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The Princeton Theological Review



Spring 2006

A TRIBUTE TO STANLEY GRENZ

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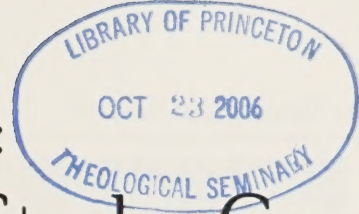
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Prolegomena: In Dedication to Professor Stanley Grenz

by Erik C. Leafblad

The untimely death of Stanley Grenz took the world of evangelical theology, specifically, and the wider theological community by surprise. Professor Grenz was a respected and influential thinker for a variety of people, as this issue of the *PTR* demonstrates. From young, developing theologians to pastors to academics, Grenz's impact was widespread, making his death that much more tragic and disheartening to the many who awaited further development of his theology. Despite a sense of incompleteness resulting from a life cut short, there is still much for which the theological world is grateful in Grenz's far-ranging and voluminous work. As such, the staff of the *PTR* offers this issue in tribute to Professor Grenz.

The extent of Grenz's reach is evidenced by our first article, "Straddling the Tasman" by Brian Harris, an Australian theologian, who utilizes Grenz's theological method set forth specifically in *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* towards addressing the rapidly secularized context of Australasia, leading to an increased unity between Australia and New Zealand. Our next article, Jim Beilby's "The Implications of Postmodernism for Theology," takes up postmodernity, something Grenz was quite interested in, examining specifically issues related to epistemology – meta-narratives, foundationalism, and realism – and in so doing, raising questions that those theologians interested in following Grenz will undoubtedly have to address. Our third article, "Faith Seeking Understanding in a Postmodern Context," comes from John Franke, who offers a summary of the work that he and Professor Grenz did in their widely popular book, *Beyond Foundationalism*, arguing that insofar as we are in a postmodern context, a nonfoundational theology offers the church its best resource for witnessing to the triune God. Finally, Bradley Onishi offers a brief article looking at the problem of the "commodification of religion" in the contemporary Western context of consumption, examining how Grenz's theological method commends the necessary tools for a more communally based theology that shows us what it means to be truly human, over against our current individualistic, consumption based culture.

Our reflections begin with one by Roger Olson, personal friend of Professor Grenz, who reflects on Grenz's contribution to evangelical theology, while pointing out where Grenz was heading in the future. Other reflections include a look at Grenz's impact on the question of women

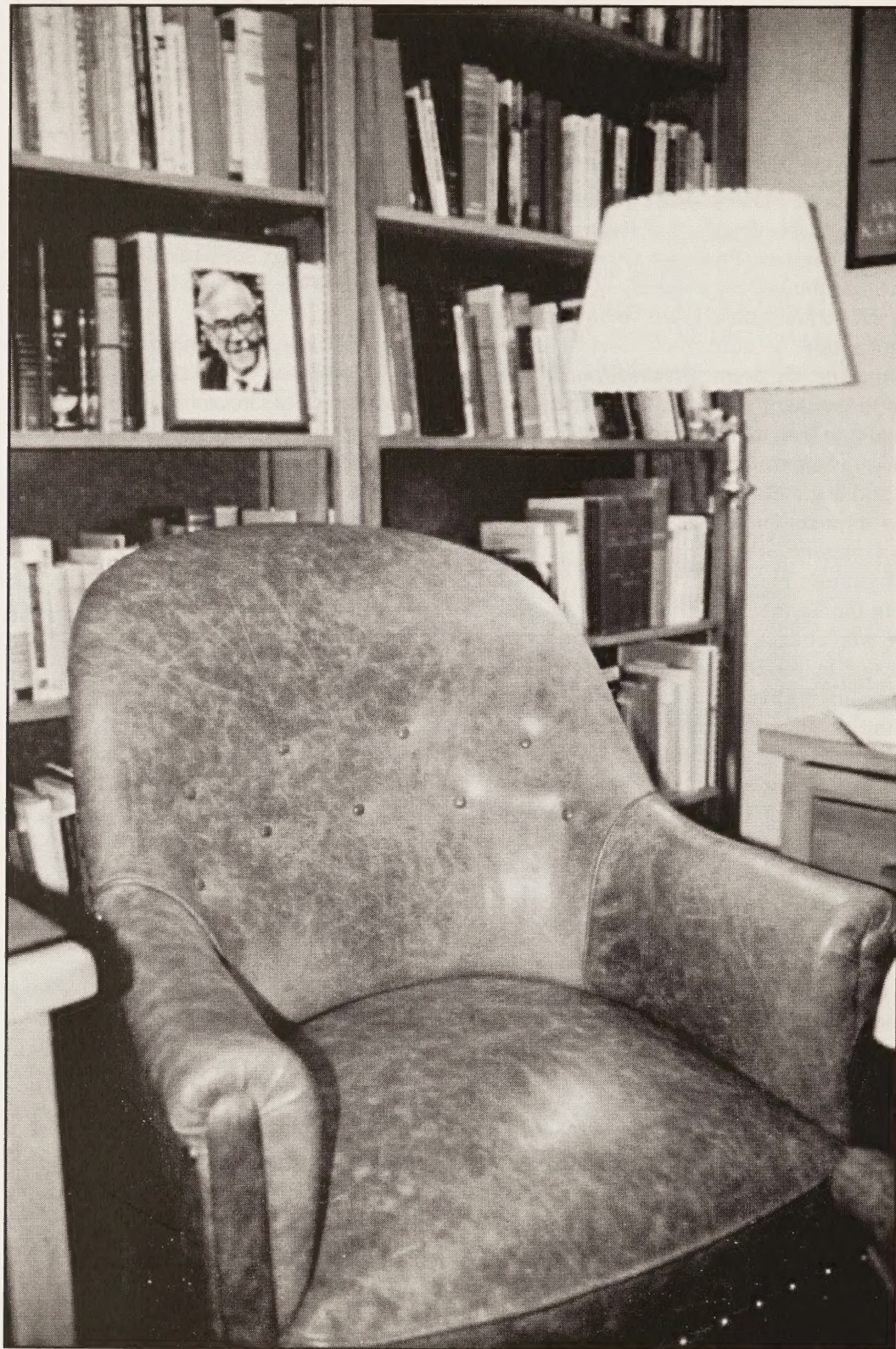
and ministry by David Komline, his grounding as a Baptist theologian by Myles Werntz, and a reflection on the import of Grenz's theology for pastors by William Mangrum. All of these reflect the way in which Grenz impacted a variety of loci.

A specific word about our introductory piece is in order. Ed Miller, professor emeritus at the University of Colorado, was a professor of Grenz's during his undergraduate studies. His anecdotal recounting of a specific chair, previously belonging to Karl Barth, tells a story about the personal side of Professor Grenz of which many readers perhaps know nothing.

For this reason, we found it a fitting introduction to an issue of the *PTR* published in tribute to Professor Grenz. Along with Professor Miller, we also petitioned Professor Wolfhart Pannenberg, Grenz's doctoral advisor at the University of Munich, in hopes that he might be able to write something on Grenz's behalf. Professor Pannenberg graciously sent our staff a personal letter. We found it fitting to include an excerpt herein:

One day, when we discussed the doctrine of baptism and I defended the Lutheran reasoning in favor of children's baptism as an expression of the unconditioned grace of God, [Grenz] asked me whether I wanted him to become a Lutheran. My answer then was that no, I would prefer that he in the context of his own tradition should find [a way] to incorporate the elements of truth from all other Christian traditions towards the formulation of a truly contemporary Christian theology. This was precisely what Stanley went to do in his later development, in the series of his later publications. It made me proud of my former student, and while I deplore his early death, I hope that his work will prove to be a lasting contribution to a new form of evangelical theology that faces the challenge of affirming the truth of the Christian message in the contemporary culture.

Indeed, if evidence from this issue of the *PTR* is any indication, Professor Pannenberg's hope is well-placed, and it is our hope that this issue might aid in furthering Grenz's already significant contribution to such a task. And so, to the late Professor Grenz, we dedicate this issue.



The theologian Karl Barth's wife Nelly Hoffman Barth gave him this chair as a present at their marriage in 1913. It was to follow them through a succession of Swiss parsonages and university posts in Germany, until Barth settled in Switzerland as a professor of theology at the University of Basel. In his article, "How I Took Barth's Chair, and How Grenz almost Took It from Me," Ed L. Miller tells more about the chair, Barth, and Stanley Grenz.

Introduction:

How I Took Barth's Chair, and How Grenz almost Took It from Me

by Ed L. Miller

It is, of course, a literal, physical Chair I'm talking about. It was the sitting Chair of the greatest theologian of the 20th century, Karl Barth (1886-1968). By "greatest" I don't necessarily mean "the best," but I do mean the most influential and prolific – an impressive list of publications, *aside* from the multi-volume, eight thousand pages of the *Church Dogmatics*! Barth sat in that big, wing-style, leather Chair on innumerable occasions. I'm told that the BBC once did a video interview showing Barth sitting in the Chair. It had followed Barth through a succession of Swiss parsonages and university posts in Germany until Barth settled in Switzerland as a professor of theology at the University of Basel. Eventually, the Barths took up residence in the Bruderholz area, just west of Basel, and the Chair found a permanent place in the living room.

How did I, of all people, wind up with the Barth Chair? And how did Dr. Stanley Grenz almost get it from me? The story goes like this.

I

I had received my doctorate in philosophy from the University of Southern California in 1965. On the occasion of my first sabbatical at the University of Colorado, I undertook a second doctorate, this one in theology, which I began at the University of Basel during the academic year of '73-'74 and completed during my second sabbatical in '80-'81. It was during the first sojourn that I was introduced to a remarkable man who, along with his wife, was studying theology. His name was Dale Brownell. At that time he was a kind and supportive sort of person, but also given to flamboyance and exaggeration. The story is told, on good evidence, that in his "streaking" days, he once ran around the block in freezing cold, naked except for cowboy boots. When properly clothed, his attire consisted, without fail, of a green suit with vest.

We advance now to my second sojourn in Basel. The Brownells were still there. One fall evening, I and my wife, Cynthia, joined the Brownells for dinner in a cozy *Fischstube* on the Rhine. I was already aware that when the Brownells first arrived in Basel at the end of the sixties, they had been invited (I don't know why) to take over the care and occupation of the recently vacated Barth house until its sale. (It was, in fact, sold, and is today maintained by a foundation. Barth's study, and an adjacent room, is just he left it, filled with books and a print of Grünewald's *Crucifixion* and portraits of Mozart and Calvin positioned at equal heights.) After a year or two, the Barth house was sold, and it became necessary for the Brownells to move. According to the Brownells, Nelly Hoffman Barth sought to re-

ward the Brownells for their care of the place during the interim. This she did by giving them a large leather sitting Chair, along with the story that she had given this Chair as a wedding present to Barth on the occasion of their wedding in 1913 – apparently, an exchange of gifts was the custom. The Chair went with the Brownells to an apartment in Basel. It stayed there for many years.

But then in the *Fischstube*, in the fall of '80, the Brownells announced that they were moving again and disposing of unwanted stuff, including the Chair: Would I like the Chair? They themselves detested Barth's theology but knew that I had Barthian inclinations. So, within a few days I and a friend (Richard Atwood, from Texas, who finished a doctorate at Basel, married a Swiss girl, took up a ministry in Switzerland, and lived happily ever after) were found trudging along, over several blocks, bearing the Chair on our shoulders, to Sommergasse 138. I faithfully occupied the Chair while reading Calvin's *Institutes* and, in good Barthian fashion, smoking my pipe and a vast quantity of tobacco.

But then doubts began to creep in. As mentioned earlier, Brownell, even at the time of my first Basel sojourn, was a strange bird. But by the time of my second sojourn, his delusional states had advanced considerably. The last time I saw him he was preparing to conduct a special concert for the Hamburg Symphony Orchestra, provided that the proposed program met with his approval! I decided that a little more investigation was called for.

I called Franziska Zellweger, Barth's daughter, born in 1914 and still living in the area. She did have a recollection of a Chair that had been in the family for years; but, she said, she had tried to suppress the bad memories of those years – an allusion to Barth's long-lasting relationship to his assistant, the good-looking Charlotta von Kirschbaum, who lived with the Barths and often traveled with Barth. Undeterred, I decided to get it from the horse's mouth if possible.

Markus Barth, the son of Karl Barth, was a professor of New Testament at Basel. During my first sojourn, I took a course from him and had many discussions with him about his father's theology. During the second sojourn, the question of the Chair came up. Yes, he recalled such a Chair. Yes, he would be glad to come and look at it. "For the price of a lunch of course," he added jovially. We met after one of his classes. We drove to Sommergasse 138. We took the elevator to the third floor. We entered my flat. And without hesitation he said: "Ja, that is the Chair!" I then made good on my pledge for lunch, over which we talked about natural theology: "The idea of 'natural theol-

ogy' makes no more sense than 'a horse of a cow.'"

The time came to leave Basel. Over these years we had kept our little apartment, making occasional trips to Basel and renting it out. Though in Colorado, we decided to let it go. My friend in Basel, Al Stones, was preparing to return to the States, along with a house-full of furniture, and I asked him to bring the Chair too. For a while, Stones kept the Chair in his office at Fuller Seminary and eventually took it with them to Oxnard. It sat in their garage for several years. Finally, I had it shipped to Boulder. My office at the University of Colorado, Hellems 274, became the home of the Barth Chair.

After so many years of wear and tear, it became apparent that the Chair had to be restored – the leather was hanging in shreds and you could hardly sit in it without sliding onto the floor. It cost me \$1,000 to restore the Chair to its original state. But think of it: It was the Chair of the greatest theologian of the 20th century!

II

Stan Grenz was a student of mine at the University of Colorado. He wanted to become a Baptist minister. Little did I expect that he would grow into one of the leading evangelical theologians of our time.

I have a vivid recollection of Grenz the undergraduate. One incident in particular speaks volumes about Grenz's being a little "out of it" with respect to the real world. It was toward the end of the semester and, in fact, the end of his college career. He entered my office seeking advice. He had received a notice inviting him to join an organization of some sort. It seemed to him to have something to do with Greece. I informed him that he been to elected to *Phi Beta Kappa*!

Grenz went on to Denver Seminary, a Baptist-oriented institution. Grenz himself was affiliated with the Baptist General Conference. I attended his ordination and (though a Lutheran) was allowed to say a few words of support. Probably the most important influence in seminary was that of Dr. Vernon Grounds, Dr. Gordon Lewis, and Dr. Bruce Demarest. In the meantime, his wife, Edna, was completing a B.A. in music. Before his graduation from seminary, Grenz had settled on the life of a professor. But where would he go for a doctorate? I myself claim some credit for what happened next.

During my first sojourn in Basel, I took a trip to Munich for the purpose of meeting with the German professor, Wolfhart Pannenberg. A good relationship was established, including plans for a visit to Boulder as part of a lecture tour. This visit to Boulder came off in good style. It included a brunch at my home, with many friends and faculty. And Grenz. Thus, I had the occasion to make the introduction: "Professor Pannenberg, this

is Mr. Grenz. Mr. Grenz, this is Professor Pannenberg." A spark was immediately struck, and we know the rest of the story. Stan and his wife, Edna, were off to Germany, he to work on his doctorate with Pannenberg, and she to work for "Meals on Wheels." My wife and I once visited them. They occupied the back portion of a small church. They put us up in a small, unfinished area, up above someplace. We learned early in the morning that it was the belfry!

After his doctoral work at Munich, he returned to the States where he held a teaching post at North American Baptist Seminary and, later, Carey Theological College in Vancouver. He distinguished himself as a theologian to be reckoned with. Edna was in the process of distinguishing herself as a director of choirs and eventually earning a Doctor of Worship Studies.

Stan's death was as untimely as it was shocking. At the pinnacle of his career, he was writing, publishing, teaching, and traveling at breakneck speed. It was my privilege to have coauthored a book with him, and it was an honor that he dedicated one of his books to an old professor and friend.

I think it was about six months before he died that I saw Stan for the last time. He was in Denver to visit his mother, and he came to visit me in Boulder too. We met for dinner at the Cheesecake Factory on the Pearl St. Mall. We talked about his work. We talked about my work. We talked about Pannenberg. We talked about our families. We talked about his move to Baylor University and return to Regent. We talked about the publishing business. And we talked about the Chair.

Stan knew the story of the Chair. He also knew that I had been diagnosed with brain cancer and had gone through radiation, chemo, and three brain surgeries. A doubtful future, to say the least. It probably took a little courage for him to pose the question: "Ed, what's going to happen to the Barth Chair when you're gone?" I had not thought that much about it. But, yes, what a splendid idea! It would go to Grenz! But life has a funny way of giving and then taking it back. It was not I but Stan who was taken first. He died suddenly from a massive brain hemorrhage.

Someday, in the not too distant future, each of us, like an old worn out leather Chair, will finally collapse into a heap of molecules. Toward the end of his life, Marlon Brando mused: "What the hell was *that* all about?" Less cynical was Karl Barth, the greatest theologian of the 20th century. He once responded to a question from the audience by singing: *Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.*

Ed L. Miller is Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at the University of Colorado, Boulder, where he is Director of the Theology Forum.

Straddling the Tasman: The Relevance of Grenz's Revisioned Evangelical Theology in the Australasian Context

by *Brian Harris*

Introduction

In an article published in 1992, Stanley Grenz suggests that by adopting "community" as the integrative motif for theology, "North American evangelical theology will also discover that it is being linked to insights that lie at the center of theological expressions of the gospel found in other regions of the one world we share in common."¹ To what extent was Grenz correct? Do his theological method and motifs interact meaningfully with expressions of evangelicalism found outside of the North American context within which his theology was birthed? Are Grenz's insights helpful in plotting a path for evangelicalism outside of his own setting? In this paper, I explore the helpfulness of Grenz's approach within the context of Australasian

evangelicalism, focusing particularly on evangelical theology and expression in both New Zealand and Australia.

Both New Zealanders and Australians would realize the risks inherent in discussing these two countries together. As the smaller of the two, New Zealand is particularly quick to assert the differences be-

tween Australian and Kiwi culture. In light of his long residence in Canada, Grenz likely appreciated this distinction. Canadians do not like being thought of as Americans, just as Kiwis do not appreciate being mistaken for Australians!

There are marked differences between the evangelical churches in Australia and New Zealand. Evangelicalism in New Zealand was deeply impacted by the charismatic renewal of the 1970s. This has left it significantly more exposed to what can be described as the Wesleyan Holiness trajectory of evangelicalism than in Australia, where the charismatic renewal tended more distinctly to divide Australian evangelicals into those falling within the Wesleyan Holiness stream and those within the Reformed stream.

While Grenz's influence in Australia and New Zealand has primarily been through many books and journal articles, his personal and professional visits also made an impact. In July 1997, he was the keynote speaker at the Conference of the South Pacific Association of Bible Colleges, which was held at the Bible College of New Zealand as part of its 75th anniversary celebra-

tion. In February and March 2001, he lectured at Tabor College and Burleigh (Baptist) College. One year later, he delivered the Barrett Lectures at the Southern Cross College and was the keynote speaker for the Association of Pentecostal and Charismatic Bible Colleges of Australia. This trip also included visits to the Bible College of Queensland, the Queensland Baptist College of Ministries, and the Brisbane chapter of the Australian and New Zealand Association of Theological Schools. If it were not for his untimely death, Grenz would have again visited Australia in 2006.

Grenz most often visited colleges with either a charismatic or Pentecostal emphasis (e.g., Tabor, Southern Cross, and the Association of Pentecostal and Charismatic Bible Colleges)

or a Baptist heritage (e.g., Burleigh and Queensland Baptist College of Ministries). It is within these communities in Australasia that his work has been most appreciated, and I will argue that Grenz serves as a key bridge theologian between both charismatic and Pentecostal theologians and evangelicals.

The somewhat embattled status of the movement has led to an embrace of the generous orthodoxy Grenz represents. The weakened state of the church does not allow for the luxury of indulging in doctrinal hair splitting, and those who do so tend to be treated with exasperation rather than sympathy.

Before assessing Grenz's contribution to Australasian evangelicalism, let us endeavour to understand its context.

Setting the Scene

It is sometimes noted that while North America was settled by people seeking freedom *for* religion, New Zealand and Australia were settled by people seeking freedom *from* religion!² Though a gross overgeneralization, the embedded kernel of truth should not be ignored. On hearing the latest theory of church growth to emanate from the U.S.A., both New Zealand and Australian church leaders tend to respond with a suspicious, "...but that's American!" When pressed, they will go on to suggest that the missional context of North America is much more sympathetic than that found in either New Zealand or Australia; therefore, the likelihood of American programs succeeding in Australasia is slight.³ The reason is not simply the sub-cultural elements of most of these programs, but also the receptivity of the populations. Historically, a polite but unenthusiastic embrace of the Christian faith of their British colonizers has character-

ized both New Zealand and Australian churches. The nominal form of Christianity adopted tended towards the ceremonial and sacramental rather than warm-hearted “convertive piety,” which Grenz saw as characteristic of evangelical faith and which has been so much more influential in the North American context.⁴

Though evangelicals have not been dominant players within the broader church scene in either Australia or New Zealand, their influence in recent

years has grown. However, one should view this growth against a broader backdrop of declining church attendance and influence in both countries. In part, the rise of the evangelical voice has been a result of the increasingly subdued tones of other forms of Christianity.⁵ Overall, both countries have become increasingly secularized and the Christian voice marginalized.

Some New Zealand Images

Grenz was not averse to selecting key events as being indicative of a broader trend or paradigm shift. If Grenz can write that “[p]ostmodernism was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on July 15th, 1972, at 3:32pm” – the moment when the modernist Pruitt-Igoe housing project in was dynamited to the ground – I can be so bold as to suggest that the current state of evangelicalism in New Zealand can be understood by three key events and images that are suggestive of a broader shift.⁶

The first image is the music of David and Dale Garrett. This significant New Zealand contribution to the music of the charismatic renewal of the 1970s reflects the deep impact this movement made in the country. In his 1978 publication *Fire in the Fireplace*, Charles Hummel expressed the hope that the charismatic renewal would be stoked within the safety of the established church denominations, rather than burning uncontrolled in a plethora of newly formed and unaccountable churches. New Zealand was one of the few countries where this plea was heeded.⁷ While the charismatic renewal did birth new church groups, it also deeply affected already existing denominations. Its impact is still clearly evident amongst evangelicals in New Zealand today.

The second image is the epic struggle surrounding the passage of the bill to decriminalize homosexual acts between males in New Zealand in 1986. Space does not allow the telling of the tale, but for our purposes it is enough to note that the evangelical church went to extraordinary lengths to mobilize its forces to defeat this bill – and failed.⁸ The movement would have profited from reading Grenz’s *Welcoming but not Affirming*,⁹ but it had not then been written. Sadly, the movement settled for a

response of which it now cannot be proud, leaving evangelicals unable to sway national decisions.

The third image is the 2005 arrest and imprisonment of Graham Capill for child molestation. A previous leader of the Christian Heritage Party, Capill’s face was associated with right-wing evangelical Christianity in New Zealand. His harsh tirades against what he perceived to be any breach of Christian morality saw him increasingly marginalized within the evangelical church he claimed to represent, but the public perception of Capill as a representative evangelical

remained. The multi-layered tragedy of this event is hard to overestimate. It leaves an evangelical church searching for alternatives in a missional context that has significantly hardened.

The combination of these three images suggests an evangelical church characterized by warm-hearted convertive piety that views the broader social arena with growing concern and an increasing sense of powerlessness. Given the context, the risk of the church retreating into a ghetto mentality is real, though in practice the evangelical church is creative and willing to explore new options.¹⁰ The convertive heart of evangelicalism prevents the church from retreating from society, though church leaders are acutely aware that in the New Zealand context influence is unlikely to come from political power or social prestige.¹¹ The somewhat embattled status of the movement has led to an embrace of the generous orthodoxy Grenz represents. The weakened state of the church does not allow for the luxury of indulging in doctrinal hair splitting, and those who do so tend to be

treated with exasperation rather than sympathy.

Strengths and weaknesses are often closely aligned. While Grenz welcomed evangelicalism’s shift “from a creed based to a spiritu-

ality-based identity,” he was clear that this “does not require the severing of intellectual from spiritual theology.”¹² At times evangelicals in New Zealand appear to be willing to embrace the experiential without subjecting it to adequate theological critique.

Some Australian Images

Crossing “the ditch” to Australia reveals a somewhat different context that is more difficult to characterize. One could easily draw from the well of Australian mythology. Images of the Australian outback, the outlaw hero Ned Kelly, or the significance of Anzac day readily spring to mind. However, one suspects they do not do justice in describing the missional context of the Australian church.¹³ In noting the difference between essays

The impetus for Grenz’s revisioning is an awareness that the missional context of the church in the West is rapidly changing.

Rather than lamenting the rise of postmodernism, Grenz seeks to engage it constructively, and this positive tone of missional engagement meets with a ready reception in the Australasian context.

on the religious scene written by New Zealand and Australian theologians. Emilsen and Emilsen note that “compared with the New Zealand contributions, there is a noticeable reticence about taking a broad measure of the Australian religious landscape” and go on to speak about “the reticence of Australian contributors in indulging in broad mapping.”¹⁴ Perhaps Australia is too immense and varied. Perhaps there is a fear of reductionism that will distort Australia into being a larrikin former convict colony. Perhaps vast distances have led to a greater geographic isolation and therefore a focus on the local rather than the national scene. The closest I can come to Australian images is to provide two alternate snapshots of evangelical faith, one from Sydney, the other from Perth.

The first image is Sydney itself, where two rival forms of evangelicalism compete.¹⁵ Sydney Anglicanism represents the first form. Globally, the Anglican Communion tends to be diverse and inclusive. The Sydney diocese is a notable exception; it is strongly evangelical in character and almost uniformly so. The majority of its clergy have trained at Moore Theological College, known for its commitment to a Reformed and Calvinist expression of the evangelical faith. The evangelicalism of Sydney Anglicanism clearly distinguishes between who

is in and who is out, and convertive piety undoubtedly lies at the heart of the movement. Soon after his election as Sydney’s archbishop, Peter Jensen committed the diocese to a ten-year mission project with a goal to see 10% of the region’s population in Bible-based churches within 10 years through multiplying Bible-based Christian fellowships and churches.¹⁶

Hillsong represents the second form of Sydney evangelicalism. With around 19,000 worshippers each weekend, it sits on the Pentecostal edge of evangelicalism. It is contemporary, enthusiastic, and undoubtedly successful. While Sydney Anglicanism remains close to the biblical text, Hillsong’s success lies in its understanding of culture and its successful marketing. As with Sydney Anglicanism, convertive piety lies at the heart of the movement. Beyond that, differences become striking and Sydney Anglicans are quick to point out the doctrinal shortcomings of Hillsong. The divisiveness of this context is one Grenz understood well.

The second image is Perth’s annual “Church Together” service, which successfully draws together around 200 of Perth’s churches for an evening that includes contemporary worship and listening to an evangelistic speaker and then finishes with a youth-focused praise party. It is a remarkable display of unity and succeeds in straddling the many divisions within evangelicalism (and beyond) – albeit only for an evening!

Both images seem to be valid representations of Australian evangelicalism, which at its best is inclusive and under-girded by a generous orthodoxy. However, it can quickly swing to an

ethos where suspicions run rampant and “guilt by association” inhibits the exploration of alternatives.

Grenz’s Relevance in the Australasian Context

We now come to our key questions: What relevance does Grenz’s understanding of a revisioned evangelicalism have in this context? Is his contribution limited to North America, or does it impact Australasia as well?

In *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, Grenz explores seven areas of evangelicalism in need of revisioning if the movement is to be relevant in the transition to postmodernity. First, evangelical identity ought to be understood experientially and not limited to matters of doctrine. Second, spirituality is to be understood holistically rather than simply doctrinally. Third, the theological task must not be restricted to the formulation of acceptable theological propositions. Instead, “from their vantage

point within the Christian tradition, theologians seek to assist the church in bringing the affirmation of faith, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ into the contemporary context.”¹⁷ Theology is contextual and flows from within the community of faith and for the community of faith. Fourth, the three key

One could argue that the charismatic movement in Australasia is in search of a theology to describe and validate its experiences, and Grenz’s relevance to this search should not be underestimated.

sources for theology are scripture, tradition, and culture. These should be conversation partners; a foundationalist frame must not underpin all others. Fifth, while evangelicals have rightly stressed the inspiration of scripture, there is a need to explore and emphasize our belief in the illumination of scripture. The scriptures are pneumatologically mediated and should be communally received and interpreted. Sixth, the theological integrative motif often adopted by evangelicals (i.e., the Kingdom of God) must be given more substantial content, and Grenz suggests the motif of community meets this need. Seventh, evangelicals have tended to neglect ecclesiology, and this defect should be corrected.

The impetus for Grenz’s revisioning is an awareness that the missional context of the church in the West is rapidly changing. Rather than lamenting the rise of postmodernism, Grenz seeks to engage it constructively, and this positive tone of missional engagement meets with a ready reception in the Australasian context. While there are pockets of reserve and caution, the reactionary backlash that Grenz encountered in such works as *Reclaiming the Center* is largely absent.¹⁸

In outlining Grenz’s contribution to the Australasian discussion, several points spring to the fore. I have limited myself to ten, hoping they will be sufficiently representative to provide an understanding of the value of Grenz’s work in the Australasian scene.

First, Grenz’s willingness to engage culture as a significant source for theology is helpful. Though we could debate if Grenz

really sees culture as a *source* or a *resource* for theology, his awareness that theological context is influenced by cultural context is a needed correction to the naïve assumption that theology is timeless and culture-free. The missional possibilities of theology engaging culture are quickly grasped in the Australasian setting. Stuart Devenish has argued for the need for the resuscitation or “repristination” of the Christian message in Australia.¹⁹ Devenish worries that “the spiritual ‘responsiveness’ of the average Australian is not matched by the missional ‘readiness’ of the churches” and argues for a revisualization of the Christian gospel that is possible as a result of the rising tide of spiritual re-enchancement with postmodernity.²⁰ Like Grenz, Devenish sees the missional opportunities in the shift from the modern to the postmodern condition.

Second, the focus on pneumatology in Grenz’s doctrine of scripture is particularly helpful in the Australasian context.

In New Zealand, where the charismatic renewal has left a deep interest and openness to the work of the Spirit, Grenz helps to articulate beliefs towards which New Zealand theologians are groping. In Australia, where pneumatology is a more divisive issue, Grenz points to a possible path forward. It is not insignificant that the majority of Grenz’s Australian commitments were in settings just as readily described as “charismatic” or “Pentecostal” as they would have been “evangelical.” One could argue that the charismatic movement in Australasia is in search of a theology to describe and validate its experiences, and Grenz’s relevance to this search should not be underestimated.²¹ Though Grenz’s emphasis on the role of both the Spirit and the community in mediating the meaning of scripture has proved controversial in the North American context (and meets with modest reserve in some Australian centers), the dominant Australasian awareness is of the fruitful possibilities this approach opens.²²

Third, Grenz’s use of community as an integrative motif for theology resonates deeply in the Australasian heart. “Mateship” is both a strong Australian and New Zealand value, and while the isolation of both countries has led to a certain rugged individualism and self-reliance, it has also led to an appreciation and valuing of the neighbor. In recent years, urbanization has led to an increased sense of isolation and disconnection. A statistic that bothers New Zealanders and Australians is that of the suicide rate. While media reports are often conflicting, a consistent theme is that the rate is significantly higher than in other parts of the Western world.²³ At this point, we should heed Grenz and Franke’s warning that “[t]heology...and not sociology...must emerge as our ultimate basis for speaking of the church as a community.”²⁴ While the impetus for embracing the motif of community is ultimately theological, the fact that it strikes a

longing within the Australasian heart is especially helpful.

Fourth, the relationship Grenz draws between the motif of community and the Trinity is important. His emphasis on relationality within the Trinity and its implication for Christian community is one that is appreciated and increasingly explored within the Australasian context.

Fifth, Grenz’s stress on the role of the Spirit in the creation and guidance of the Christian community is to be welcomed in the Australasian context. The emphasis on the Spirit opens up the possibility of dynamic interaction rather than of static boundary-drawing. This can also be linked to Grenz’s understanding of the role of the Spirit in illuminating the tradition of the church; this illumination is communally received. A revisioned understanding of the church’s tradition can plot a path beyond the impasse of denominational divides and artificially imposed boundaries.

Sixth, Grenz’s use of both tradition and culture as sources

for theology is refreshing. In his critique of evangelicalism, Mark Strom, the current Principal of the Bible College of New Zealand, writes that “evangelicalism works largely by maintaining the myth that it is not a cultural, historical and social phenomenon: ‘We simply believe the truth.’”²⁵ Clearly, this trite fable concerns Strom. Grenz’s

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willingness to adopt both culture and tradition as sources for evangelical theology is as a move towards greater honesty and transparency in theological method, which gives it greater integrity and credibility.

Seventh, Grenz’s gentle dissatisfaction with the state of evangelical theology opens doors in the Australasian context. Alan Jamieson’s study of “Churchless faith” has been influential in New Zealand and beyond.²⁶ Concerned by the exodus of people from evangelical, charismatic and Pentecostal churches in New Zealand, Jamieson suggests that a reason for their departure is their dissatisfaction with an environment where questioning and independent thought is discouraged. Linking this to James Fowler’s stages of faith development, Jamieson suggests that the environment created corresponds to Fowler’s “Stage Three” faith or the “Synthetic-Conventional” stage.²⁷ Grenz’s more open-ended approach to evangelical faith is useful here. Rather than the tight boundaries often associated with evangelicalism, Grenz proposes that “the evangelical movement functions more like a centered set than a bounded set.”²⁸ In practice, this assessment of evangelical theology might be optimistic, but if indicative of a desired trajectory, it would allow for a broadening of the range of evangelical experience and belief. Observers of the New Zealand scene suggest this is important for the future of the movement in the country.²⁹

Eighth, while some would feel that Grenz’s conclusions on homosexuality in *Welcoming but Not Affirming* are too cautious,

the tone and style of writing has been noted. This is especially helpful in the New Zealand context where the press have dismissed evangelicals as being homophobic and where political activism by evangelicals has largely been unhelpful.³⁰ It is also indicative of an appropriate tone to adopt in other ethical debates.

Ninth, Grenz and Bell's *Betrayal of Trust* provides helpful guidelines on dealing with and avoiding sexual abuse.³¹ The book's 1995 publication date is commendable. It reflects an early response to an issue that evangelicals initially tried to avoid, and it is to Grenz's credit that he tackled the topic promptly. It also reflects Grenz's willingness to engage the issues of the day. Evangelicals in Australasia have been affected by many incidents of sexual abuse, and a police clearance is now required for all working with children in churches in Australasia. The church's credibility has been compromised, and the missional task has consequently been made more difficult. Grenz's work serves as a helpful resource in this setting.

Tenth, Grenz's plea that evangelicals develop a more adequate ecclesiology is pertinent in Australasia. It is interesting that even Sydney Anglicanism has a very flexible understanding of ecclesiology and is content to define its mission for the next decade as being the planting of bible-based churches.³² Other than being bible-based, the desired ecclesiology is unclear.

A Shortcoming or Two

An area of disappointment in Grenz's theology from an Australasian perspective is the relative lack of serious ecological engagement. The earlier Grenz had indicated this would be a part of his agenda, but the later Grenz failed to produce. Thus, in a 1985 article Grenz had written that a "holistic theology also deals with the earth. It decries humanity's rape of creation...."³³ Interestingly, Davis validly cites Grenz's *Theology for the Community of God* as an example of the scant attention evangelical theologians pay to ecological concerns.³⁴ Perhaps Grenz's choice of community as his integrating motif leads to this oversight. It is a criticism Australian theologian Frank Rees echoes in his examination of Grenz's *The Social God and the Relational Self*. Rees writes, "[T]he inherently relational character of humans is limited to human relationships only, without consideration of how profoundly our life and well-being is interdependent with that of the rest of the cosmos."³⁵ If the older Grenz had heeded his younger voice, perhaps this critique could have been avoided. It is one that bites deeply in the Australasian conscious, especially in New Zealand where ecological issues rank high on

the national agenda.³⁶

One could also argue that there is little engagement with the issue of global injustice and the inequitable distribution of the world's wealth. Again, the younger Grenz indicated this would be a focus for his theology. In his 1985 article "A Theology for the Future," Grenz suggested the growing gap between rich and poor, the increasing greed of wealthy countries, and the rapid population growth in poorer countries as well as the nuclear proliferation were key issues a theology for the future would have to address.³⁷ There is no special focus on this in his later work. Located as they are in wealthy countries, the evangelical churches in New Zealand and Australia have also allowed the issue of global justice to slip down the agenda, and it is a pity that Grenz was not able to have a more prophetic voice in this regard.³⁸

In highlighting these two shortcomings, I think I speak with an Australasian voice. While North American critics of his theology question if Grenz domesticates the gospel, compromises the notion of truth, or capitulates to postmodernity, the Australasian voice pragmatically asks whether Grenz has plotted a clear enough path. "How then should we live?" is seen as the more pertinent question in this part of the globe.³⁹

A Concluding Affirmation

It would be churlish to end on a note of criticism. The relevance of Grenz's theological method for the Australasian context is clear. Though I have limited myself to ten points of appreciation, they were selected from a far larger list. Though there are distinct differences between evangelicalism in New Zealand and Australia, the ethos of Grenz's approach helps to straddle the Tasman. The weakened state of Christianity in both countries has fuelled a strong commitment to mission, and Grenz's engagement with a changed context helps illuminate a path ahead. If Grenz was a pietist with a Ph.D., his commitment to the integration of that spectrum is exemplary.⁴⁰ Australasian evangelicals join others in celebrating Grenz's fruitful life, while at the same time lamenting that it was a life too short.

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Notes

1. Stanley J. Grenz, "'Community' as a Theological Motif for the Western Church in an Era of Globalization," *Cruix* 28, no. 3 (1992): 18.
2. This thesis is strongly rejected by some. Col Stringer argues that Australia has a strong Christian heritage, and rather than portraying it as a settlement of convicts, he suggests it should be seen as the "South Land of the Holy Spirit." However, Stringer's reading of Australian history is highly selective and tends to read Australian history outside of the context of the overarching "Christendom" model that undergirded Britain's program of colonization. See Col Stringer, *Discovering Australia's Christian Heritage* (Robina: Col Stringer Ministries, 1999).
3. An interesting exception has been the successful "40 Days of Purpose" campaign.
4. Bentley, Blombery, and Hughes write, "For the purposes of this book, nominalism is defined as identification with a Christian denomination in surveys or census, and church attendance less than once a month. Defined this way, most Australians are nominal. See Peter Bentley, Tricia Blombery, and Philip Hughes, *Faith without the Church? Nominalism in Australian Christianity* (Wollstonecraft: Christian Research Association, 1992), 1. For Grenz's enthusiastic adoption of Dayton's characterization of evangelicalism, see his *Re-visioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), 23.

5. Following Darryl Hart, it could be argued that this evangelical voice is simply what was conservative Protestant orthodoxy before 1950. We attach to evangelicalism what was earlier attributed to mainstream Protestantism. See Darryl G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004).
6. Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 11.
7. Charles E. Hummel, *Fire in the Fireplace: Contemporary Charismatic Renewal* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1978).
8. For a full discussion, see Laurie Guy, *Worlds in Collision: The Gay Debate in New Zealand 1960-1984* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2003).
9. Stanley J. Grenz, *Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).
10. Given its size, New Zealand is a remarkably active contributor to discussions on the emerging church. Some very impressive resources have resulted. For one example, see Steve Taylor, *The Out of Bounds Church: Learning to Create a Community of Faith in a Culture of Change* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).
11. Some might argue that this portrayal of the public image of evangelicals is too gloomy and might point to the moderate success of New Zealand's Maxim Institute in shaping public opinion. Though not officially a Christian research institute, Maxim is staffed by evangelical Christians. Strong lobbying by the Institute in 2003 saw the Prostitution Reform Bill come within one vote of defeat. However, in 2005 the New Zealand press revealed that Maxim reports and articles were guilty of serious plagiarism. This has compromised its public image.
12. Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty First Century* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), 37, 57.
13. Anzac day, when the sacrifices made by both Australian and New Zealand soldiers are remembered, opens a range of potential missional images. An excellent study of some of the possibilities is to be found in Steve Taylor, "Scars on the Australasian Heart: Anzac Day as a Contextual Atonement Image," *New Zealand Journal of Baptist Research* 6 (2001): 48-74.
14. Susan Emilsen and William W. Emilsen, "Introduction: Mapping the Landscape," in *Mapping the Landscape: Essays in Australian and New Zealand Christianity*, eds. Susan Emilsen and William W. Emilsen (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 4.
15. Suggesting only two factions is reductionist. Many groups would claim that they represent an alternate, middle ground position. However, for our purpose this contrast highlights the differences.
16. For an uncritical discussion of the mission strategy, see Robert Forsyth, "Evangelism and Ministry: The '10 Per Cent Mission' in the City of Sydney," *Transformation* 21, no. 1 (2004): 36-40.
17. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 83.
18. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjos Helseth, and Justin Taylor, eds., *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004).
19. Stuart Devenish, "Repristination: The Recovery of the Gospel in Post-Secular Australia," in *Text and Task: Scripture and Mission*, ed. Michael Parsons (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2005), 187-203.
20. Ibid, 200.
21. See, e.g., Cross's fruitful engagement with Grenz's thought in Terry L. Cross, "A Proposal to Break the Ice: What Can Pentecostal Theology Offer Evangelical Theology?" *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 10, no. 2 (2002): 44-73.
22. Don Carson's dismissive rejection of Grenz's approach to scripture is often quoted: "I cannot see how Grenz's approach to Scripture can be called 'evangelical' in any useful sense." [D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 481.]
23. A 1996 report tabled in the New Zealand parliament by Deborah Morris, Bill English, and Tau Henare quotes a New Zealand figure of 26.9 suicides per 100,000 of population, as opposed to American and Canadian figures of around 12-13 per 100,000.
24. Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 227.
25. Mark Strom, *Breaking the Silence: The Abusiveness of Evangelicalism* (Sydney: Robert Menzies College, 1993), 5.
26. Alan Jamieson, *A Churchless Faith: Faith Journeys Beyond Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches* (Wellington: Philip Garside Publishing, 2000).
27. James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 151-73.
28. Stanley J. Grenz, "Die Begrenzte Gemeinschaft ('the Boundaried People') and the Character of Evangelical Theology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45 (2002): 312.
29. See, e.g., Brett Knowles, "Is the Future of Western Christianity a Pentecostal One? A Conversation with Harvey Cox," in *The Future of Christianity: Historical, Sociological, Political and Theological Perspectives from New Zealand*, eds. John Stenhouse and Brett Knowles (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2004), 39-59.
30. See Laurie Guy, *Worlds in Collision: The Gay Debate in New Zealand 1960-1984* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2003).
31. Stanley J. Grenz and Roy D. Bell, *Betrayal of Trust: Sexual Misconduct in the Pastorate* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1995).
32. See Robert Forsyth, "Evangelism and Ministry," 36-40.
33. Stanley J. Grenz, "A Theology for the Future," *American Baptist Quarterly* 4 (1985): 266.
34. John Jefferson Davis, "Ecological 'Blind Spots' in the Structure and Content of Recent Systematic Theologies," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43 (2000): 283-84.
35. Frank Rees, "Trinity and Church: Contributions from the Free Church Tradition," *Pacifica* 17 (2004): 260.
36. One could argue that New Zealand's willingness to sign the Kyoto Protocol and Australia's refusal to do so are indicative of a Trans-Tasman divide.
37. Grenz, "A Theology for the Future," 257-67.
38. The missional importance of active social engagement is seen in both New Zealand and Australia. Australian Baptist pastor Tim Costello is one of the most recognized faces in Australia, largely as a result of his work amongst the poor and his leadership of the Australian branch of World Vision.
39. Contrast these concerns with those raised in Erickson, Helseth, and Taylor, eds., *Reclaiming the Center*.
40. Stanley J. Grenz, "Concerns of a Pietist with a Ph.D.," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 37, no. 2 (2002): 58-76.

The Implications of Postmodernism For Theology: On Meta-narratives, Foundationalism, and Realism¹

by Jim Beilby

It takes an uncommon measure of courage to argue that an organization to which one belongs must change. Because it is very rare that there is universal agreement on what (and how much) needs to change, even the least conservative members of such organizations are tempted to “shoot the messenger.” Such was the plight of Stanley Grenz.² Stan was a self-avowed and unabashed evangelical who tirelessly yet graciously argued that evangelical theology has been held hostage by a debilitating commitment to modernist philosophical assumptions. To the chagrin of many evangelicals (and the delight of some), Stan sought to re-vision evangelical theological method in terms of the ‘chastened rationality’ of postmodernity,³ the primary characteristics of which are the demise of foundationalist epistemologies and the transition from a realist to a constructionist view of truth and the world.⁴

In this essay, I am less interested in whether postmodernism is compatible with evangelical theology and more interested in a pair of logically prior questions. If one accepts Grenz’s argument that a turn away from modernism is necessary for the long-term health of Christian theology, what exactly (or even approximately) about modernism must go? And what are the implications of the rejection of modernism for theological method?

Despite the fact that most who embrace the postmodern turn have dismissed foundationalism and realism as denizens of the modernist graveyard, I will suggest that this stance is not necessary. I will argue that it is possible to agree with the

postmodern critique of modernist epistemologies but disagree with what many suggest are the implications of postmodernism for knowledge in general and theological method specifically. Consequently, the stance I will sketch in this essay could be understood either as a critique of postmodernists who too quickly dismiss notions like foundationalism and realism or a critique of certain analytic philosophers who, in their desire to defend foundationalism and realism, too quickly dismiss what is correct about the postmodern turn.

Whither Postmodernism?

But what is postmodernism? Up until now, I have been flip-pant in my use of the term. I have been using the term as if there

was clear agreement on what it signified, and that must be remedied. The difficulty of defining postmodernism has been much discussed. It is less than clear what the “post” intends to signify and, even if it is clear, there is no agreement on what aspect (or aspects) of modernism are being rejected. Further, there is no agreement on the function of whatever it

is that is labeled “postmodern.” Is it a worldview (an “ism” or something similar), a mood, a social condition, a trajectory of human discourse, or a judicious blend of all of these?

While there is no agreed upon definition, neither is “postmodernism” an infinitely fluid concept. It does not, for example, encompass Descartes *cogito ergo sum* and the quest for certainty that motivated it and neither does it — if it is to be taken seriously — entail utter nihilism. (For if it did, what would be the point in asserting the meaningfulness of postmodern attitudes, conditions, assertions, and/or critiques?) Like Justice Potter Stewart, who reportedly said about obscenity, “I can’t define it, but I know it when I see it,” there is a distinctive and recognizable flavor to the entrapments of postmodernity. In this sense, postmodernism is similar to many of the conceptual labels used in academic circles. As Dan Stiver points out, “we use terms like analytic philosophy, existentialism, phenomenology, structuralism, process philosophy, and pragmatism with meaning but also with awareness that it is notoriously difficult to come up

with demarcation criteria that will tell us in any and every case who is and who is not in the pertinent group. Postmodernism is that type of term."⁵ Grenz and Franke rightly make the further observation that the difficulty in defining postmodernism "is exacerbated by the fact that in many respects postmodern thought is in its early stages."⁶

But what is this "recognizable flavor" that allows the term "postmodern" to be used with meaning? For those attempting to answer this question, Lyotard's description of postmodernism is a common starting point. "Simplifying to the extreme," he says, "I define postmodernism as *an incredulity toward meta-narratives*."⁷ This statement has caused Christians much consternation. Since it is difficult to describe Christianity in a way that minimizes the all-encompassing nature of its claims, it is commonly thought that Christianity must, to be postmodern, either mitigate the scope of its claims, or to be orthodox, reject postmodernism.

I think that this is a false either/or and is based on an erroneous understanding of the term "meta-narrative." In his book *Overcoming Ontotheology*, Merold Westphal makes a distinction between a meta-narrative and a "mega-narrative."⁸ A mega-narrative is a narrative that has the broadest possible scope; it addresses everything in history from creation to the eschaton and has implications for just about every philosophically interesting debate ever conceived of by humans. Christianity is undoubtedly a mega-narrative. A meta-narrative, on the other hand, is not defined by the scope of its claims, but by its being a second order discourse. This second order discourse is independent, universally available, and passes judgment on the viability of first order claims. By Westphal's lights, therefore, Lyotard's suspicion of meta-narratives is a suspicion of the possibility of *an externally imposed, universally applicable legitimization discourse*. Such a legitimization discourse functions to prove (or disprove) accounts of reality and does so from a principally neutral perspective. The paradigmatic example of a meta-narrative in the Christian context is natural theology — an enterprise designed "to provide rational justification for theism using only those sources of information accessible to all inquirers, namely the data of empirical experience and the dictates of human reason."⁹

This understanding of meta-narratives raises many questions. But let us set aside the exegetical question: Is this how Lyotard should be understood? This reading of Lyotard's "incredulity toward meta-narratives" is admittedly controversial.¹⁰ Some see in Lyotard a more radical critique of human intellectual activity than that just sketched. But rather than diving into

the murky depths of Lyotardian exegesis, I want to focus on a more fruitful theological question: Should orthodox Christians be incredulous of meta-narratives like natural theology?

To my mind, that depends on whether the rejection of meta-narratives is understood as a critique of the scope of reason or a critique of the validity of reason. If we understand the postmodern critique as a critique of the *validity* of human reason,

logic, and philosophical analysis, then I'm monumentally unsympathetic. Such a claim seems simply false; there are certainly appropriate uses of reason and logic.

Moreover, the critique itself is the product of reason and therefore is self-defeating. (I realize that the 'self-referential argument' has been terribly overused in critiques of postmodernism. Nevertheless, this is a place

where the argument is appropriately employed.)

Understood as a critique of the *scope* of human reason, however, I share Westphal's incredulity toward meta-narratives (and maybe Lyotard's, depending on how he is to be understood). It seems undeniable that there are aspects of reality that lie outside the bounds of logic and reason — my love for my children, the metaphysics behind the incarnation, and belief in the existence of other minds, to name just a few. I don't mean to say that these things are contrary to reason, but merely that they are beyond it. One of the things that lie outside the bounds of reason is the ability to, in any meaningful sense of the word, *prove* our starting points — the essential philosophical and theological assumptions of our worldview. Consequently, if natural theology is understood as proving the truthfulness of the Christian worldview without reference to Scriptural or mystical revelations, it cannot get the job done. Of course, this does not mean that we cannot argue for our starting points, and neither does it mean that our arguments will never be effective.

There are many uses for natural theology, including bolstering pre-existing faith, moving agnostics closer to commitment, and undercutting atheological arguments.¹¹ My claim is merely that effectiveness of philosophical argumentation, in general, and natural theology, specifically, is limited. Such arguments are only effective when other more important conditions are present, and they function better as explanations of why we believe as we do than universally accessible demonstrations of the truth of our belief system as a whole.

While I don't claim that the understanding of postmodernity just sketched is the only possible understanding, I nonetheless propose to discuss the implications of postmodernity thus understood. While I endorse a rejection of meta-narratives (in the sense detailed above), I do not concur with what many take to

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be the implications of such a rejection for the justification of theistic beliefs and the nature of Christian truth claims.

Foundationalism and Justification¹²

One of the issues perpetually at the center of debates between the defenders and the detractors of postmodernism is foundationalism.¹³ Sadly, this debate has produced a great deal of heat, but very little light. While the list of objections to foundationalism is long and distinguished, two features are invariably the focus of postmodern disapprobation. These are, in the words of Nancey Murphy, "the assumption that knowledge systems must include a class of beliefs that are somehow immune from challenge," and "the assumption that all reasoning within the system proceeds in one direction only."¹⁴

Strong foundationalism (or, to use Alvin Plantinga's term, Classical Foundationalism) is clearly an exemplar of Murphy's first feature. Classical Foundationalism restricts the class of basic beliefs to those that are self-evident, evident to the senses, or incorrigible.¹⁵ The goal of such a restriction is to build one's epistemic foundation on beliefs which enjoy maximal epistemic warrant, beliefs which approach apodictic certainty.

The self-referential problems with Classical Foundationalism, however, are well known. Consequently, in Plantinga's words (and with his help) "Classical Foundationalism has retreated into the obscurity which it so richly deserves."¹⁶

Very few academics have stood to defend Classical Foundationalism.¹⁷ However, Classical Foundationalism does not exhaust the foundationalist alternative. Modest or broad foundationalism does not require that the foundations of one's noetic structure enjoy epistemic immunity.¹⁸ While this fact is often acknowledged, it is sad how often it is subsequently ignored.¹⁹ The result is a straw man argument in which all species of foundationalism are saddled with the flaws inherent in only one version. Consequently, the first feature Murphy finds objectionable about foundationalism is not even necessary to foundationalism!

Surprisingly, neither is the second of Murphy's criteria. The foundationalist need not conceive of epistemological justification in exclusively linear and uni-directional terms. It is perfectly possible for a foundationalist to envision the superstructure of derived beliefs as an intricate, holistic web. As such, the common metaphor for nonfoundationalism, the spider web, is available to the foundationalist. Imagine a web in a window frame. The threads which tie the web to the frame are basic beliefs, but the strength and shape of the web is not determined solely by the basic "threads" but by the interconnectedness of the "derived threads" in the middle.

Moreover, on some versions of modest foundationalism, basic beliefs can receive some (although not all) of their epistemic support from derived beliefs. Consider a very simple noetic structure of subject *S*, composed of two beliefs, *A* and *B*. *A* and *B* possess a good deal of immediate, non-doxastic warrant for *S*, but not enough to be considered knowledge. *S*, however, notices that *A* and *B* are mutually supporting and on that basis gains significant additional confidence in *A* and *B* individually. Because *A* and *B* are mutually supporting, they each transfer some of their immediate warrant to the other and in so doing increase the warrant of the other enough to be considered knowledge.²⁰ This model of justification remains foundationalist because not all the epistemic support for *A* and *B* comes from other beliefs; some of it comes from a non-doxastic source.²¹

While the rejection of meta-narratives entails the rejection of Classical Foundationalism, it is, I submit, compatible with the modest, holistic foundationalism I have just sketched. Still there is another less commonly acknowledged source of the postmodern allergic reaction to foundationalism. I submit that what offends postmodern sensibilities is not *primarily* the notion of a non-doxastic basing relationship, but the common linkage of 'foundationalisms' with another meta-epistemological position called internalism. I do not intend to lay all the blame on internalism; for some the notion of an epistemic

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the foundationalist.

foundation is intrinsically problematic. But the role of internalism in the postmodern critique of 'modernist epistemologies' has been largely overlooked and is, I believe, significant.

Very generally speaking, internalism stipulates that the features that justify a belief for a person must be internal to that person, in the sense of being part of that person's reflective awareness. Internalism, therefore, embraces what might be called a "positive internalist constraint" on justification. According to the internalist, for any given belief *p*, *p* is justified for person *S* if and only if *S* is both aware that *p* is justified for them and aware of the features — reasons, evidences, or causal relations — that are sufficient to justify *p*.²²

The incompatibility of internalism and the postmodern approach to meta-narratives can be clearly seen in the following quote by stalwart internalist, Richard Fumerton: "The demands of *philosophically relevant* justification are stronger than the demands of ordinary concepts of justification precisely because the philosopher is interested in the concept the satisfaction of which removes a kind of philosophical curiosity that prompts the raising of philosophical questions about justification in the first place."²³ Fumerton's requirement that the subject not only be justified, but that they know that they are, is precisely the sort of second order legitimation discourse that is incompatible with a healthy suspicion of meta-narratives. The problem, therefore,

is less the mere idea of epistemic foundations than it is the distinctively internalist definition of what constitutes "philosophically relevant justification."

Realism and Nonrealism

Thus far, my discussion of the implications of an incredulous stance toward meta-narratives has focused on epistemological matters. Despite the fact that I think it is possible to be incredulous of meta-narratives and remain an attenuated foundationalist, it is in the field of epistemology that I find the postmodern critique most telling.

When we are talking about metaphysics, however, my sympathies for the postmodern critique wane significantly. Many have suggested that postmodernism necessitates an end to the binary opposition inherent in logic. Others deny essentialism and the existence of universals. Still others find the idea of a proposition deeply problematic. Admittedly, simplistic either/or answers that misuse binary logic are wholly problematic. And there is a tendency among analytic philosophers to propositionalize reality into "sentence-long discourse"²⁴ and in so doing filter out or ignore imagination, poetry, and rhetoric — vehicles of meaning not easily propositionalized.

But these are critiques of the mis-use of these ideas, not their use; they are warnings, not prohibitions. It is possible to maintain an incredulity toward meta-narratives and utilize the Law of Non-contradiction. But while each of these issues is theologically important, the most crucial metaphysical issue for theological method is the realism/nonrealism debate. Happily, it is no purpose of this essay to resolve the realism/nonrealism debate, only to seek to understand the relationship between postmodernism (or at least one account of postmodernism) and realism. Our question is this: Is Grenz right that the chastened rationality of postmodernism entails a rejection of realism?

Unfortunately, there are few terms that are used in as many disparate ways as "realism." One prominent usage comes from the medieval debate over the objective reality of universals. In this debate realism is pitted against nominalism. Another usage arises from the problem of the mind-independence of the external world in which realism stands in contrast to idealism. The realism/nonrealism debate that is most salient when considering the nature and implications of postmodernism, however, is different than both of these. The realism/nonrealism debate that I shall be concerned with in this essay stems from Kant's Copernican Revolution, according to which anything that we can have knowledge of owes its basic structure to the categories we use and the linguistic conventions or conceptual schemes we employ rather than the way it is "in itself."²⁵

In a recent essay, Merold Westphal offers a definition of re-

alism that properly highlights both a metaphysical aspect and an epistemological aspect.

(1) *The real is and is what it is independent of our knowing of it.* (2) *We can know 'the real' as it is in its independence and our knowledge can correspond to it by perfectly mirroring it without reshaping it.*²⁶

The metaphysical portion of his definition is uncontentious, save for idealists, solipsists, and naive sophomore philosophy ma-

jors. Grenz and Franke also embrace realism in the first sense when they admit that "there is, of course, a certain undeniable givenness to the universe apart from the human linguistic-constructive task."²⁷ Even the "Father of Postmodern Deconstructionism," Jacques Derrida accepts the metaphysical aspect of realism. When charged by John Searle with metaphysi-

But does the acknowledgment that we lack a "God's-eye perspective" entail nonrealism? Not at all. Realism does not require that one's knowledge of reality be perfect, only that knowledge of reality is possible.

cal nonrealism, Derrida clarifies that his (in)famous declaration "There is nothing outside the text" (*Il n'y a pas de hors-texte*) does not mean that there is no external world outside texts, but that his main point is primarily epistemological²⁸ — everything exists in some cultural or linguistic context and that we have no access to the world apart from these.²⁹ And Richard Rorty affirms that "The world is out there, but descriptions of the world are not. Only descriptions of the world can be true or false. The world on its own — unaided by the describing activities of human beings — cannot."³⁰

The epistemological portion of Westphal's definition, however, is problematic because it sets up realism as a straw man. It does not capture realism *simpliciter*, but naive realism, and consequently, I cannot imagine that many — not even the aforementioned sophomores — would come to its defense. It is one thing to say that there is an external world independent of our knowledge of it, and quite another to say that our beliefs mirror it *perfectly*. Even our beliefs about middle sized objects like computer monitors and koala bears are rarely, if ever, *perfect* representations of reality and there are a host of obvious reasons why our religious beliefs *never* perfectly mirror the objects or subjects they identify. We simply do not have God's perspective on reality. But does the acknowledgment that we lack a "God's-eye perspective" entail nonrealism? Not at all. Realism does not require that one's knowledge of reality be perfect, only that knowledge of reality is possible. It is perfectly possible for a realist to acknowledge that all our descriptions of reality are linguistically mediated but deny that reality is linguistically constituted or constructed.

Consider the following example: "There are fifty peaks over 14,000 feet in Colorado."³¹ What seems to be a straight-forward descriptive sentence is significantly problematized when one

considers the definition of “peak.” How much drop in elevation is necessary before two adjacent points of higher elevation are considered different peaks rather than parts of the same peak? Because it seems difficult to hold that the criteria used to distinguish one peak from another is not arbitrary, wouldn’t Rorty be correct in saying that a particular section of a mountain was a peak “if our peers let us get away with saying it was?”³² Sure. But none of this suggests even slyly that reality is linguistically constituted, only that our description of reality must be indexed to a particular set of definitions about the terms we use to describe it. Just as the descriptive adequacy of the statement “I’m hungry” must be indexed to a particular time and person (for me, that’s right before lunch), the descriptive adequacy of statements concerning the peaks of Colorado must be indexed to a particular (even if arbitrary) account of what constitutes a “peak” (as well as an account of “fifty”, “14,000 feet” and “Colorado”). In other words, even if our interpretive and definitional frameworks play a role in how the world appears, it is still the world that appears to us, not some reality-divorced realm of mere appearances.³³

Granted, language is an imperfect tool to describe reality, just as human beings are imperfect users of language. The result is that there will often be translational imperfections and/or infelicities (Derrida’s *différance*) in our language. But this does not mean that our linguistic conventions never correspond to reality, only that they *do not necessarily* do so and, when they do so, we will not be able to prove our referential success to a skeptic. Nevertheless, an incredulity toward meta-narratives is perfectly compatible with the assertion that *we can know aspects of reality, even if imperfectly*. Of course, the “know” in “we can know aspects of reality” would have to be devoid of positive internalist constraints; we do not know the extent to which any given belief of ours corresponds to reality. But my point is that granting that our control beliefs and definitions affect our accounts of reality does not entail that our accounts of reality are completely of our own construction. This understanding of realism is commonly labeled “critical realism,” but since seemingly everybody vies for that label, I prefer the term “minimalist realism.” What makes this brand of realism “minimalist” is that no single conceptual scheme, set of categories, or philosophical method is accorded the privilege of being our sole epistemic access to what there is.³⁴ What makes this minimalist approach “realist” is that referential success is the goal and the possibility of referential success is acknowledged.

For a good way to apply this ‘minimalist realism’ to theological method, I recommend Kevin Vanhoozer’s “Canonical

Linguistic” approach in which he develops a cartographic metaphor for religious knowledge. Doing theology is a matter of following maps.³⁵ While the purpose of the map is to describe reality, the adequacy of a map is not purely ontological — “Does it perfectly mirror the real?” — it is also pragmatic — “Does it effectively guide the journey?”³⁶ We must avoid ontological reductionism. The Christian worldview or system of theology never exists for its own purpose, but for the purpose of salvation, life transformation, and reconciliation. But neither is ontology irrelevant to the task of following maps and, therefore, pragmatic concerns cannot be the sole epistemic desideratum. A map can only provide its life-guiding pragmatic benefit if it effectively guides *the* journey; it needs to be the map to the right location.

In his modeling of theological doctrines as a map, Vanhoozer strikes the right balance between two competing intellectual virtues that reside at the center of the dialogue over postmodernism — humility and conviction. Postmodernism is a call for the intellectual virtue of humility. This call merges with deep and powerful currents in the Christian tradition. Our createdness and fallen-ness impress upon us the contingent and partial nature of our knowledge of even the most apparently obvious beliefs and all the more so with respect to beliefs that so easily become self-serving and idolatrous. But (as with most intellectual virtues) unbridled humility is not a virtue, but a vice. To avoid becoming a vice, humility must be balanced by another intellectual virtue: conviction. Conviction requires taking a stance on what is the case, not merely on what it is useful to think is the case. Emphasizing the role of conviction does not, however, sneak a meta-narrative in the back door. Conviction does not require “knowing that you know,” only believing that your “maps” of reality are both generally adequate and aimed at the right destination.

While the heralds of the postmodern turn excel at pointing out many epistemological excesses inherent in modernism, I find their discussion of conviction relatively sparse.³⁷ It is not that I disagree with their call for humility, rather, it is, only half of what needs to be said. Sure, it is the first thing that needs to be said, and it needs to be said quite loudly and repeatedly in certain intellectual circles, but ending there is as dangerous as turning a deaf ear to death throes of naive realism, classical foundationalism, and Cartesian certainty.³⁸

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Notes

1. This essay is offered in honor of Stan Grenz, a scholar whose myriad academic achievements, as impressive as they are, pale in comparison to his kind, gracious, and gentle spirit.
2. Among Grenz’s voluminous corpus, see especially *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996); *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993); and (with John Franke) *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).
3. The term “chastened rationality” was a favorite of Grenz’s and appeared in many of his works. See especially “Articulating the Christian Belief Mosaic: Theological Method After the Demise of Foundationalism” in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 108; *Beyond Foundationalism*, 22-23; and *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 169.
4. Grenz, “Articulating the Christian Belief Mosaic,” 108-109.

5. Dan Stiver, "The Uneasy Alliance Between Evangelicalism and Postmodernism: A Reply to Anthony Thiselton," in *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David Dockery (Wheaton, IL: Bridge Point, 1995), 242.
6. Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 21.
7. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.
8. Merold Westphal, *Overcoming Ontotheology: Toward a Postmodern Christian Faith* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), xiii.
9. James F. Sennett and Douglas Groothuis, "Introduction: Hume's Legacy and Natural Theology," in *In Defense of Natural Theology: A Post-Humean Assessment*, eds. James F. Sennett and Douglas Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 10.
10. See for example, John D. Caputo, "Methodological Postmodernism: On Merold Westphal's *Overcoming Onto-Theology*," *Faith and Philosophy* 22/3 (July 2005), 284-196 and, in the same issue, Justin Thacker, "Lyotard and the Christian Meta-narrative: A Rejoinder to Smith and Westphal," 297-315.
11. See Alvin Plantinga, "Rationality and Public Evidence: A Reply to Swinburne," *Religious Studies* 37 (2001), 217.
12. For the purpose of simplicity, I will ignore the (rather significant) differences between justification and warrant. As far as I can see, doing so does not affect the substance of my argument.
13. My argument in this section bears some affinities to that of J. Wentzel van Huyssteen in his "Is the Postmodernist always a Postfoundationalist? Nancy Muphey's Lakatosian Model for Theology" in *Essays in Postfoundationalist Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 73-90.
14. Nancy Muphey, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity, 1996), 13.
15. See Alvin Plantinga's discussion in "Reason and Belief in God," in *Faith and Rationality*, eds. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 55-59.
16. Alvin Plantinga, "Advice to Christian Philosophers," *Faith and Philosophy* 1/3 (July 1984), 258.
17. Notable counter-examples can be found in *Resurrecting Old-Fashioned Foundationalism*, ed. Michael DePaul (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001).
18. See, for example, Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," 82-83; *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 344.
19. For example, in *The Character of Theology: A Postconservative Evangelical Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 26-27, John Franke alludes to the distinction between types of foundationalisms in referring to a particular form of foundationalism as 'strong' or 'classical,' but then goes on to say that foundationalism is "philosophically indefensible," that it is "in dramatic retreat," and refers to "the rejection of the foundationalist approach to knowledge" as a central tenet of postmodernism. In each of these sweeping and unequivocal indictments, there is no acknowledgment of the fact that there are different species of foundationalism. Franke does something very similar in "Christian Faith and Postmodern Theory: Theology and the Nonfoundationalist Turn," in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*, ed. Myron B. Penner (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2005), 108-110.
20. Keith De Rose, "Are Christian Beliefs Properly Basic?" unpublished, 3; cited with permission.
21. Note that the traditional objection to coherentism, that warrant cannot be circular, does not affect this example, because there is no circle. *A* is partially based on *B* and *B* partially on *A*, and therefore, none of the warrant for *A* originated with *A* and passed through *B*. See De Rose, 4.
22. For a more thorough discussion of internalism and its counterpart, externalism, see my *Epistemology as Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), chapter 5; see especially, 145-158.
23. Richard Fumerton, "Replies to Pollock and Plantinga," in *Resurrecting Old-Fashioned Foundationalism*, 69; italics mine.
24. A phrase used by Kevin Vanhoozer in "What Systematic Theology has to Say to Analytic Philosophy (and to Postmoderns) About Postmodernity" (Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Philosophical Society, Valley Forge, PA, November 18, 2005), 4.
25. William Alston, *A Sensible Metaphysical Realism* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001), 8.
26. Merold Westphal, "Of Stories and Languages," in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*, 231.
27. Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 53.
28. Jacques Derrida, *Limited, Inc.*, trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 136. Derrida would, however, likely prefer the term 'hermeneutical' to 'epistemological.'
29. Myron B. Penner, "Cartesian Anxiety, Truth, and Victimization: A Response to J. P. Moreland," unpublished, 6; cited with permission.
30. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 5.
31. An example offered by Alston in *A Sensible Metaphysical Realism*, 12.
32. While the phrase "Truth is what our peers let us get away with saying," is commonly attributed to Rorty, one rarely finds an accompanying citation. What Rorty actually says is "The aim of all such [realist] explanations is to make truth something more than what Dewey called: 'Warranted assertability': more than what our peers will, *ceteris paribus*, let us get away with saying" in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 175-176.
33. Frank B. Farrell, *Subjectivity, Realism, and Postmodernism: The Recovery of the World in Recent Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 127; cited in Vanhoozer, "What Systematic Theology has to Say to Analytic Philosophy (and to Postmoderns) About Postmodernity," 3.
34. Vanhoozer, "What Systematic Theology has to Say to Analytic Philosophy (and to Postmoderns) about Postmodernity," 3.
35. Kevin Vanhoozer, "Pilgrim's Digress: Christian Thinking on and about the Post/Modern Way," in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*, 88-89; *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 294-297.
36. As Westphal points out. See his "Of Stories and Languages," 238.
37. A notable exception is Paul Ricoeur. He postulates the possibility of a second naïveté which arises from the marriage of a hermeneutics of suspicion with a hermeneutics of trust. See his *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 351-357.
38. An earlier draft of this paper was presented as part of a panel discussion held at the Evangelical Philosophical Society annual meeting in November, 2005. I benefited greatly from the interaction with my co-panelists, Merold Westphal, Kevin Vanhoozer, and Doug Geivett, and with the moderator, Myron Penner.

Faith Seeking Understanding In a Postmodern Context: Stanley Grenz and Nonfoundational Theology by John R. Franke

On numerous occasions when Stanley Grenz was asked something like, "What was it that got you interested in postmodernity?" he replied that it started in general as he became aware of the different ways in which his son was looking at the world, and in particular through watching *Star Trek: The Next Generation* together with him and talking about it. Doubtless Stan was aware of the academic discussions of postmodern thought, but he always, at least in my presence (and I must have heard him answer this question at least a dozen times), pointed to his relationship with his son as the starting point for his own more focused exploration of postmodernity. Stan was always interested in what people were thinking about, where culture might be headed and the ways in which these matters were important for the business of theology.

He was raised in a pietistic and evangelical Baptist home that shaped his outlook on the Christian experience and theology. After studying philosophy at the University of Colorado and theology at Denver Seminary, he traveled to the University of Munich to earn his doctorate under Wolfhart Pannenberg, before returning to North America to take up the task of teaching theology after a brief stint as a Baptist pastor. In the process of teaching theology, Stan became convinced that the standard evangelical paradigms that he had been taught, and which he believed had served a previous generation well, needed to be rethought in the context of the changing cultural environment in North America. From the perspective of his pietist heritage this did not entail an abandonment of his evangelical commitments. Rather, it simply marked a concern to rethink the intellectual theological framework that was formed around the experience of a living faith in Jesus Christ.

He first articulated the basic shape of his thinking in a brief volume entitled *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* that addressed the challenges for evangelical theology as it faced a cultural transition from modernity to postmodernity.¹ This transition was displayed for Stan as he watched *Star Trek: The Next Generation* with his son and reflected on the ways in which it differed from the original *Star Trek* series he remembered from his late teenage years.² While *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* sparked a fair amount of interest and discussion, it was also

clear that it was only a preliminary sketch of some particularly important questions, as well as a precursor to a more fully delineated proposal for theological method in an intellectual context increasingly shaped by postmodern concerns.

This work of fuller delineation took on book form in *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*, which sought to develop and extend the themes Stan had set forth in his earlier work.³ The story of how I came to share that work with Stan is told briefly in the preface of *Beyond Foundationalism* and does not need to be repeated here. Let

Stan's willingness to work with a younger thinker on such a project was but one example of his extraordinary professional generosity, another side of his work that is less well known but which was an integral part of his vision for the practice of doing theology.

me simply add that Stan's willingness to work with a younger thinker on such a project was but one example of his extraordinary professional generosity, another side of his work that is less well known but which was an integral part of his vision for the practice of doing theology. This article will offer a brief summary of the work Stan and I did together in *Beyond*

Foundationalism as a tribute to the visionary theological legacy of my mentor and friend, whose forays into postmodern thought provide a compelling example of a vibrant, committed Christian faith seeking intellectual and spiritual understanding in the context of a changing culture.

The Postmodern Situation

In order to appreciate the engagement between theology and the postmodern context it is important to realize that a precise understanding of postmodernity is notoriously difficult to pin down. Despite the fact that there is no consensus concerning the meaning of the term, it has become almost commonplace to refer to the contemporary cultural situation as postmodern. The lack of clarity about the term has been magnified by the vast array of interpreters who have attempted to comprehend and appropriate postmodern thought. In the context of this lack of clarity about the postmodern phenomenon, the term has come to signify widely divergent hopes and concerns among those who are attempting to address the emerging cultural and intellectual shift implied by the term.

Yet, in spite of the numerous manifestations of the postmodern condition and the divergent opinions and struggles concern-

ing the portrayal of postmodernity in various domains and situations. Steven Best and Douglas Kellner maintain, "that there is a shared discourse of the postmodern, common perspectives, and defining features that coalesce into an emergent postmodern paradigm."⁴ However, since this new postmodern paradigm is emerging, but neither mature nor regnant, it continues to be hotly contested by both those who desire to embrace it for particular purposes as well as those who find reason to oppose it.

Best and Kellner suggest that the representations of this emerging paradigm that take shape in the context of intellectual, social, and cultural activity constitute "a borderland between the modern and something new for which the term 'post-modern' has been coined."⁵

In order to understand the nature of this shared discourse it will be helpful to understand postmodernity as a label that identifies an ongoing paradigm shift in Western culture. Almost without exception, those who are engaged in the pursuit of this paradigm shift use the term postmodern. This engagement generally involves the vigorous critique of the modern paradigm and some general and tentative suggestions concerning the shape of an alternative. This observation enables us to suggest a basic, minimalist understanding of postmodernism as referring primarily to the rejection of the central features of modernity, such as its quest for certain, objective and universal knowledge, along with its dualism and its assumption of the inherent goodness of knowledge. It is this critical agenda, rather than any proposed constructive paradigm to replace the modern vision, that unites postmodern thinkers. Nancey Murphy employs the term postmodern to describe emerging patterns of thought and to "indicate their radical break from the thought patterns of Enlightened modernity."⁶ In short, postmodern thought is discourse in the aftermath of modernity.

This broad construal of postmodern thought as a critique and rejection of modernity leads to a central dimension of postmodern theory. At the heart of the postmodern ethos is the attempt to rethink the nature of rationality in the wake of the modern project. This rethinking has resulted not in irrationality, as is often claimed by less informed opponents of postmodern thought, but rather in numerous redescriptions and proposals concerning appropriate construals of rationality and knowledge after modernity. In spite of their variety, these attempts can be broadly classified as producing a chastened rationality that is more in-

herently self-critical than the constructions of rationality common in the thought-forms of modernity. One of the focal points of this chastened rationality is the rejection of epistemological foundationalism and the adoption of a nonfoundationalist and contextual approach to the theological enterprise.

In the modern era, the pursuit of knowledge was deeply influenced by Enlightenment foundationalism. In its broadest sense, foundationalism is merely the acknowledgment that not all be-

liefs are of equal significance in the structure of knowledge. Some beliefs are more "basic" or "foundational" and serve to give support to other beliefs that are derived from them. Understood in this way, nearly every thinker is in some sense a foundationalist, rendering such a description unhelpful in grasping the range of opinion in epistemological theory found among contemporary thinkers. However, in philosophical circles foundationalism refers to a much stronger epistemological stance than is entailed in this general observation about how beliefs intersect. At the heart of the foundationalist agenda is the desire to overcome the uncertainty generated by the tendency of fallible human beings to error and the inevitable

disagreements and controversies that follow. Foundationalists are convinced that the only way to solve this problem is to find some means of grounding the entire edifice of human knowledge on invincible certainty.

This quest for complete epistemological certitude, often termed "strong" or "classical" foundationalism, has its philosophical beginnings in the thought of the philosopher René Descartes. Descartes sought to reconstruct the nature of knowledge by rejecting traditional medieval or "pre-modern" notions of authority and replacing them with the modern conception

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approach to knowledge does
not demand that knowledge
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**The Bible is the instrumentality of the
Spirit in that the Spirit appropriates
the biblical text in order to speak to
the church for the purpose of creating
a "world" that finds its coherence in
Jesus Christ.**

of indubitable beliefs that are accessible to all individuals. This conception of knowledge became the dominant assumption of intellectual pursuit in the modern era. In terms of a philosophical conception of knowledge, foundationalism is a theory concerned with the justification of knowledge. It maintains that beliefs must be justified by their relationship to other beliefs and that the chain of justifications that results from this procedure must not be circular or endless, but must have a terminus in foundational beliefs that are immune from criticism and cannot be called into question. The goal to be attained through the identification of indubitable foundations is a universal knowledge that transcends time and context. In keeping with this pursuit,

the ideals of human knowledge since Descartes have tended to focus on the universal, the general, and the theoretical rather than on the local, the particular, and the practical.

In spite of the hegemony of this approach to knowledge, Nancey Murphy notes that it is "only recently that philosophers have labeled the modern foundationalist theory of knowledge as such."⁷ This means that while this approach to knowledge has been widely influential in intellectual thought, it has been assumed by modern thinkers rather than explicitly advocated and defended. In light of this Murphy suggests two criteria in the identification of foundationalism: "first, the assumption that knowledge systems must include a class of beliefs that are somehow immune from challenge; and second, the assumption that all reasoning within the system proceeds in one direction only—from that set of special, indubitable beliefs to others, but not the reverse."⁸ The goal of this foundationalist agenda is the discovery of an approach to knowledge that will provide rational human beings with indubitable certainty regarding the truthfulness of their beliefs. The Enlightenment epistemological foundation consists of a set of incontestable beliefs or unassailable first principles on the basis of which the pursuit of knowledge can proceed. These basic beliefs must be universal, objective, and discernable to any rational person apart from their particular situation, experience, and/or context.

In the postmodern context, however, classic foundationalism is in dramatic retreat, as its assertions about the objectivity, certainty, and universality of knowledge have come under fierce criticism. J. Wentzel van Huyssteen writes: "Whatever notion of postmodernity we eventually opt for, all postmodern thinkers see the modernist quest for certainty, and the accompanying program of laying foundations for our knowledge, as a dream for the impossible, a contemporary version of the quest for the Holy Grail."⁹ The heart of the postmodern quest for a chastened rationality lies in the rejection of the foundationalist approach to knowledge.

A nonfoundationalist approach to knowledge does not demand that knowledge systems must include a class of beliefs that are immune from criticism; rather all beliefs are subject to critical scrutiny. It also maintains that reasoning within the system proceeds not in one direction only, but rather moves conversationally in multiple directions. This suggests a metaphorical shift in our understanding of the structure of knowledge from that of a building with a sure foundation to something like a web of interrelated, interdependent beliefs. Further, the ideals of hu-

man knowledge in nonfoundational and contextual approaches place emphasis on the local, the particular, and the practical rather than on the universal, the general, and the theoretical.

Nonfoundational theology also brings with it an inherent commitment to contextuality that requires the opening of theological conversation to the voices of persons and communities who have generally been excluded from the discourse of Anglo-American theology. It maintains without reservation that no single human perspective, be it that of an individual or a particular community or theological tradition, is adequate to do full justice to the truth of God's revelation in Christ. Richard Mouw points to this issue as one of his own motivations for reflecting seriously about postmodern themes: "As many Christians from other parts of the world challenge our 'North Atlantic' the-

ologies, they too ask us to think critically about our own cultural location, as well as about how we have sometimes blurred the boundaries between what is essential to the Christian message and the doctrine and frameworks we have borrowed from various Western philosophical traditions."¹⁰ The adoption of a nonfoundationalist approach to theology mandates a critical awareness of the role of culture and social location in the process of

Scripture appears to suggest a much broader understanding of the Spirit's presence. Consequently, theology should be alert to the voice of the Spirit manifest in the artifacts and symbols of human culture. However, it should be added that the speaking of the Spirit through the various media of culture never comes as a speaking against the text.

theological interpretation and construction. From the perspective of the ecumenically orthodox Christian tradition, nonfoundational theology seeks to nurture an open and flexible theology that is in keeping with the local and contextual character of human knowledge while remaining thoroughly and distinctly Christian.

Nonfoundational Theology

From a Christian perspective, nonfoundational theology involves the interplay of three sources: Scripture, culture, and tradition. While the Christian tradition has been characterized by its commitment to the authority of the Bible, much debate has been engendered in the church as to the precise way in which its authority ought to be construed. This leads us to consider how the Bible ought to function in theology by pursuing the assertion that Scripture is theology's "norming norm." The point of departure for this affirmation of Scripture as norming norm lies in the Protestant principle of authority articulated in confessions such as *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, which states: "The Supreme Judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of counsels, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other

than the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture."¹¹ This statement reflects the Protestant concern to bind Word and Spirit together as a means of providing the conceptual framework for authority in the Christian faith and brings into focus the sense in which the Bible is viewed as norming norm: Scripture holds this position because it is the instrumentality of the Spirit.

The Bible is the instrumentality of the Spirit in that the Spirit appropriates the biblical text in order to speak to the church for the purpose of creating a "world" that finds its coherence in Jesus Christ. As Walter Brueggemann maintains, the biblical text "has generative power to summon and evoke new life" and holds out an eschatological vision that "anticipates and summons realities that live beyond the conventions of our day-to-day, take-for-granted world."¹² This points to the capacity of the text to speak beyond the context in which it was originally composed. In short, as John Goldingay declares, the text "calls a new world into being."¹³ However, the point that needs to be stressed here is that this capacity for world construction, while bound closely to the text, does not lie in the text itself. Instead, this result is ultimately the work of the Spirit speaking through the text as the instrumentality of world creation. Further, the world the Spirit creates is not simply the world surrounding the ancient text or the contemporary world, but rather the eschatological world God intends for creation as disclosed, displayed, and anticipated by the text.

While the ultimate authority in the church is the Spirit speaking in and through Scripture, this speaking always comes to its hearers within a specific social, historical context. This points to the role of culture in theology. The specificity of the Spirit's speaking means that the conversation with culture and cultural context is crucial to the theological task. Because theology must be in touch with life in the midst of present circumstances, the questions, concerns, and challenges it brings to the Scriptures are not necessarily identical with those of contemporary exegetes or even the ancient writers themselves. Douglas John Hall states that what theology seeks "from its ongoing discourse with the biblical text is determined in large measure by its worldly context," in order that it might address that setting from "the perspective of faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."¹⁴

In addition to listening for the voice of the Spirit speaking through Scripture, theology must also be attentive to the voice of the Spirit speaking through culture. While Western theology has tended to focus on the church as the sole repository of all truth, the only location in which the Spirit is operative, Scripture appears to suggest a much broader understanding of the Spirit's presence. Consequently, theology should be alert to the voice of the Spirit manifest in the artifacts and symbols of human culture. However, it should be added that the speaking of the Spirit through the various media of culture never comes as a speaking against the text. Setting the Spirit's voice in culture against the

text is to follow the foundationalist agenda and elevate some dimension of contemporary experience or thought as a criterion for accepting or rejecting aspects of the biblical witness. Therefore, while being ready to acknowledge the Spirit's voice wherever it may be found, we must still uphold the primacy of the text as theology's norming norm. While we cannot hear the Spirit speaking through the text except by listening within a particular social-historical setting, the Spirit speaking through Scripture provides the normative context for hearing the Spirit in culture.

Scripture, theology's norming norm, is always in conversation with culture, theology's embedding context. In this way the Spirit continually speaks to the believing community in its present situation through the witness of Scripture to the paradigmatic events of God's revelation in Jesus Christ as a means of providing ongoing guidance for the church as it grapples with constantly changing circumstances. This raises implicitly the question of the role of the Christian tradition, as the historical

witness to the speaking of the Spirit, in the task of contemporary theological construction. A nonfoundationalist conception views the tradition of the church primarily as the hermeneutical trajectory in the context of which the theological task of the community is pursued. From this perspective

the Christian tradition provides a hermeneutical trajectory for theology that is open-ended, eschatologically directed, and performatively operative.

A helpful distinction may be drawn between "open" and "closed" confessional traditions. Closed traditions hold a particular statement of beliefs to be adequate for all times and places. In contrast, an open tradition, in the words of Jack Stotts, "anticipates that what has been confessed in a formally adopted confession takes its place in a confessional lineup, preceded by statements from the past and expectant of more to come as times and circumstances change." An "open" confessional tradition understands its obligation to develop and adopt new confessions in accordance with shifting circumstances. Although such confessions are "extraordinarily important" for the integrity, identity, and faithfulness of the church, "they are also acknowledged to be relative to particular times and places."¹⁵ Throughout the course of the ebb and flow of the history of the church the Spirit is at work completing the divine program and bringing the people of God as a community into a fuller comprehension of the implications of the gospel. This activity of the Spirit will reach consummation only in the eschatological future. Until then the church must grapple with the meaning and implications of the biblical message for its context as it listens patiently and expectantly for the voice of the Spirit speaking afresh through Scripture and yet in continuity with the Spirit-guided trajectory of Christian tradition.

Gabriel Fackre summarizes this on-going, dynamic, and eschatological orientation that characterizes the nature of the

Christian theology is the explication of the interpretation of God and the world around which the Christian community finds its identity.

Christian tradition:

The circle of tradition is not closed, for the Spirit's ecclesial Work is not done. Traditional doctrine develops as Christ and the Gospel are viewed in ever fresh perspective. Old formulations are corrected, and what is passed on is enriched. The open-endedness, however, does not overthrow the ancient landmarks. As tradition is a gift of the Spirit, its trajectory moves in the right direction, although it has not arrived at its destination.¹⁶

In short, at the heart of tradition and its role in theology is the eschatological directedness of the Spirit's work in guiding the community of faith into the purposes and intentions of God which comprise a divinely-given *telos* that is ultimately realized only at the consummation. The eschatological-directedness of the community as a whole gives a similar character to the theological reflection that becomes church tradition.

Another aspect of the function of tradition as hermeneutical trajectory emerges through the metaphor of performance. Tradition provides an interpretive context for the task of living out or "performing" the deepest intentions of an established, historical community. The purpose of theology is to facilitate and enable authentic "performance" of the Christian faith by the community of Christ's disciples in its various cultural locations. Tradition provides an essential component in this process. Like the performance of a symphony that has only one score but many possible interpretations, so the text of Scripture has been subject to numerous interpretations over the centuries. While the score of the symphony is authoritative, it demands performance in order to realize the intention for which it was produced and performance requires interpretation. However, not all interpretations have equal integrity; some are too radical or idiosyncratic. Determinations as to the legitimacy or illegitimacy of particular interpretations and performances emerge in the context of tradition. Frances Young offers a helpful perspective on the performative metaphor. She writes:

For classic performance, tradition is indispensable. A creative artist will certainly bring something inspired to the job, but an entirely novel performance would not be a rendering of the classic work. Traditions about appropriate speed and dynamics are passed from master (or mistress) to pupil, from one generation to another, and a radical performance will be deliberate reaction against those traditions if it violates them.¹⁷

The tradition of the Christian community functions in much the same manner. It establishes a context for authentic interpretation and performance of the biblical message and its implications, which allows for creativity in addressing new situations

while providing a basis for identifying interpretation that is not consonant with the historic position of the community.

Three motifs provide coherence to this nonfoundational approach to the ongoing conversation between Scripture, culture, and the Christian tradition. The first is the Trinity, theology's structural motif. By its very definition, theology, the study of God, has as its central interest the divine reality, together with God's actions in creation. The chief inquiry for any theology, therefore, is the question of the identity of God. The Christian answer to the question "Who is God?" ultimately leads to the doctrine of the Trinity. Christians confess that the one God is triune – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In keeping with this fundamental Christian confession, both the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed – the ancient and ecumenical symbols of the church – are ordered around and divided into three articles that correspond to the three persons of the triune God: the Father and creation; the Son and reconciliation; the Spirit and salvation as well as consummation. For much of the history of the church this creedal pattern gave rise to a trinitarian structure in the construction and exposition of theology.

Because Christian theology is committed to finding its basis in the being and actions of the God of the Bible, it should be ordered and structured in such away as to reflect the primacy of the fundamental Christian confession about the nature of this God. In a properly trinitarian theology, the structuring influence of God's triunity goes well beyond the exposition of theology proper, extending to all as-

pects of the delineation of the Christian faith.

The relational and social character of the triune God, coupled with the Christian confession that human beings are created in the image of God and that the gathered community is the Body of Christ points to the focal point of the church in the task of theology. Tying these commitments together points to the concept of community as theology's integrative motif. The New Testament characterization of the church as the body of Christ leads to the conclusion that the Christian community is intended to be the focal point of the representation and image of the triune God in the world.

From the perspective of the linguistically and socially constructed nature of reality, the church is the context in which the Spirit works to create a socially constructed "reality" that anticipates the ultimate reality of the consummated kingdom, a world centered on Jesus Christ. Christian theology is the explication of the interpretation of God and the world around which the Christian community finds its identity. Theology engages in this task for the purpose of facilitating the fellowship of Christ's disciples in fulfilling their calling to be the image of the social and missional God and thereby to be the community God desires and destines the church to become. A context in which the future world as God wills it to be is established in a proleptic fashion in the present as the church anticipates its participation

Christian theology may be construed as Christocentric in its communitarian focus and Christotelic in its eschatological orientation.

in the Trinitarian fellowship of love.

The model of this love is Jesus Christ in his ministry of reconciliation characterized by obedience to God in the form of sacrificial love and service, which the church is called upon to imitate as the ongoing representative of Christ in the world, the metaphorical Body of Christ (Phil. 2:5-11).

The proleptic character of the Christian community points to eschatology as theology's orienting motif. The ongoing work of the Spirit is manifest in the appropriation of the biblical narrative in order to speak to the church for the purpose of creating a socially constructed "world" that finds its coherence in Jesus Christ in accordance with, and in anticipation of, the "real" world as it is willed to be by the Father. However, the world as God wills it to be is not a present reality, but rather lies in the eschatological future. Thus, while acknowledging that there is indeed a certain "objectivity" actuality to the world, it is important to recognize that this "objectivity" is not that of a static actuality existing outside of, and co-temporally with, our socially and linguistically constructed realities. It is not what some might call "the world as it is." Instead, the biblical narratives set forth the "objectivity" of the world as God wills it. Hence, Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10 NIV).

The "real" world is the future, eschatological world that God will establish in the new creation. Because this future reality is God's determined will for creation, as that which cannot be shaken (Heb. 12:26-28), it is far more real, objective, and actual than the present world, which is even now passing away (1 Cor. 7:31). In this way the biblical narratives point to what might be called "eschatological realism."

In relating this eschatological realism to the insights of social constructionists we note that human beings, as bearers of the di-

vine image, are called to participate in God's work of constructing a world in the present that reflects God's own eschatological will for creation. This call has a strongly linguistic dimension due to the role of language in the task of world-construction. Through the constructive power of language, the Christian community anticipates the divine eschatological world that stands at the climax of the biblical narrative in which all creation finds its connectedness in Jesus Christ (Col. 1:17) who is the Word (John 1:1) and the ordering principle of the cosmos. Hence, Christian theology may be construed as Christocentric in its communitarian focus and Christotelic in its eschatological orientation. This eschatological future is anticipated in the present through the work of the Spirit who leads the church into truth (1 John 2:27). From this perspective the Christian community affirms truth, under the guidance of the Spirit, through the construction of a linguistic world that finds its coherence in Christ in accordance with the will of the Father.

Such a trinitarianly structured, communally focused, and eschatologically oriented theology assists the church in the task of distinctively Christian world construction by drawing on the unique grammar of the biblical witness to the revelation of the triune God in Jesus Christ in order to create a linguistic world for human habitation and flourishing in the present, whose basis lies in the new creation that God is already bringing to pass. Hence, theology speaks about the actual, future world for the sake of the mission of the church in the present, anticipatory era to proclaim the Good News that in Jesus Christ the world is reconciled to God and invited to participate in the relational fellowship of love that characterizes the divine life.¹⁸

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Notes

1. The full citation for this work is Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1993).
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Grenz's Theological Method and the Commodification of Religion

by Bradley B. Oschi

Throughout his career, Stanley Grenz proved to be a fresh voice in the conversation between theology and the postmodern situation. His work broke fresh theological ground for the evangelical tradition; work which must now be carried on with the same sense of irenic humility, ecumenical wisdom, and intellectual rigor in which he practiced the discipline.

In a *Primer on Postmodernism*¹ and *Beyond Foundationalism* (with co-author Franke),² Grenz's engagement with postmodernism focused on epistemological issues, giving attention to such figures as Rorty and Fish. Expanding on this conversation, this essay will undertake a brief examination of the socio-economic-political factors of the condition of postmodernity in order to broaden the scope of the two-way conversation between the Church and culture. This task is crucial to the life of the Church if it is to avoid the dual tragedies of a reclusive sectarianism or a liquidated diremption of particularity in the face of modern or postmodern cultural demands. Taking our cue from Grenz, we will begin with the assumption that community is the *telos* of existence;³ insofar as communion is the eternal being of the triune God and that state of being for which we were given life as a part of creation. With this in mind, we will examine the current moral and cognitive lens which dominates our cultural landscape—the process of commodification.

Due to the dominance of technical reason, the breakdown of traditional identity markers, and the mutations of late-capitalism, modernity has morphed into a condition of postmodernity in which cultural resources for identity formation have been eroded by the process of commodification, resulting in a context which leaves individuals no choice but to form their social identity through consumerism. This process has even subsumed the place of religion, which has not been spared from the process of commodification.

Thus, in this assessment of the socio-cultural condition of postmodernity, we shall examine the means by which individuals are integrated into society. We shall conclude, following Zygmunt Bauman, that the integrating factor that provides the broad cultural framework and primary agent in moral formation is consumption. It is hoped that this brief examination on the current cultural situation will highlight the need to critically reflect on the reigning cultural paradigm of commodification and how it relates to the perpetual process of clarifying the Chris-

tian-belief-mosaic within local Christian communities. In the end, commodification stands opposed to the perfect communion of the triune God and the call to participate in that communion for God's people.

Postmodernity, Consumption, and the Commodification of Culture

Commenting on the work of Marx, philosopher Vincent Miller writes, "Our very lives become objects of exchange. In Guy Debord's words, Marx sensed a fundamental shift in the mode of human existence from 'being' to 'having.'"⁴ We will call this progressive dynamic *commodification*. Commodifica-

tion is the current condition of Western life that shapes all attitudes, beliefs, and relationships in terms of "having." This condition was set in motion due to what David Lyon calls "the reshaping of capitalism" and the rise of "communication-information [tech]nologies."⁵ This process shapes how Western

With consumption acting as the integrating force of individuals into society at large, an exploration into the effects of the dominance of consumption on human relationality is necessary in order to fully understand the consequences of commodification.

people approach fundamental aspects of life, including relationships with other persons and even religion. All things—people, family, cultural symbols and icons—are subject to the ruthless process of commodification.

Zygmunt Bauman sums it up, "Postmodernity is marked by dominance of consumption: In present-day society, consumer conduct (consumer freedom geared to the consumer market) moves steadily into the position of, simultaneously, *the cognitive and moral focus of life, the integrative bond of the society, and the focus of systemic management*."⁶ Henceforth, consumption serves as the beginning point of rationality—it is the means of meaning-making. Furthermore, human beings are primarily shaped morally through the mode of consumption as well as being integrated into society through it; consumption dictates culture. The driving force of consumerism dominates cultural values, perspective, and beliefs. As a result, culture has adjusted to capitalism's authority through the adoption of plurality and difference. Bauman continues:

Culture in general has lost its relevance to the survival and perpetuation of the system . . . Once consumer choice has been entrenched as the point in which systemic reproductions, social integration and individual life-world are co-ordinated and harmonized—cultural variety, heteroge-

neity of styles and differentiation of belief-systems have become conditions of its success.⁷

In other words, now that consumption operates as the central, organizing principle of society, culture is subject to capitalism's demands.

This integrating factor has a profound effect on the ways in which individuals are trained to interpret the self and their relationship with others. With consumption acting as the integrating force of individuals into society at large, an exploration into the effects of the dominance of consumption on human relationality is necessary in order to fully understand the consequences of commodification. John Francis Kavanaugh writes:

... our very being and purpose is calculable solely in terms of what we possess, measurable solely by what we have and take. We are only insofar as we possess. We are what we possess. We are, consequently, possessed by our possessions, produced by our products. Remade in the image and likeness of our own handiwork, we are revealed as commodities.⁸

Commodification is the physical manifestation of a mode of being which leaves the individual no choice but to seek their worth as a human being through consumption. In the process, we become commodities ourselves.

Consequently, the process of identity formation is a privatized process: it is up to individuals to make sense of their life within the postmodern matrix—no identity, worth, or value is given at birth, it must be created, or in many instances, purchased. David Lyon points out, "Where once we might have identified ourselves in terms of the village or clan we came from . . . now nothing is fixed . . . The realm of choice has opened up tremendously for most people in the affluent societies, giving us unprecedented opportunities to choose lifestyles and beliefs from a range of options."⁹ While this has levied unlimited freedom of taste, style, and image, it has also resulted in many people being left with feelings of "constraint, oppression, limitations, or just a sense of arbitrariness and caprice, on their capacity freely to forge a future for themselves."¹⁰ Under the power of commodification, life degenerates into the endless search for self-transcendence. Through the use of new technologies, this transcendence is now marketed, packaged, and sold to us. Value, meaning, and purpose are lost in the rush of the moment. Commodities are objects and when people are transformed into objects their lives lose their meaning. Life becomes nothing more than thrill and adrenaline.

The Commodification of Religion

Religion has not been left unaffected by these socio-economic developments, where it too has been subjected to the ruthless process of commodification. Religious beliefs, symbols, and rituals are now largely seen as accoutrements to the consumer identity, tacked on for their transcendent effect or mystical appeal. Thus, t-shirts with an image depicting Jesus,

and the words "Jesus is My Homeboy" have become quite popular amongst young people. Further prayer beads are worn and monastic chants are sold to a mass market on CD's—these are but a few of the manifestations of spiritual artifacts in popular culture. In the process, the communities in which these religious resources originate are left behind in favor of the custom-built consumer identity, which itself is constructed for and by the individual. Furthermore, what lies at the root of this approach to religion is fundamentally opposed to "community." The interpretive framework by which commodified religious beliefs are appropriated is by no means the Christian interpretive framework spoke of by Grenz, or any other communitarian network of shared meanings and symbols. Rather, instead of identity-forming, these beliefs are formed by the interpretive framework, the meaning-maker, of consumption.

The commodification of religion has profound consequences on the place, role, and function of religious belief in the lives of religious consumers. Religious signs, symbols, and images are taken from their traditional places within the believing community and sold on the open market as an enticing source of transcendence in an endless sea of commodities. "Religion has become a special effect . . . as symbolic capital with a certain charismatic past, it can give places, goods, even people, a mystic charge."¹¹ The spiritual flavor of these religious goods provides "a mystic charge" as Ward says, to the consumer identity of individuals. Contrary to the secularization thesis, religion has not been replaced, only reclassified.

Much of the appeal of this approach is the felt security that religious goods can bring to the consumer identity in face of the abyss that is postmodern life. Graham Ward says, "These simulations of religion, religion as symbolic capital, are used as an aesthetic diversion from the profound uncertainties, insecurities and indeterminacies of postmodern living."¹² Consequently, in many instances religion is now employed to be a coping mechanism that can provide some sense of security in a chaotic and schizophrenic world—in a word, therapy. David Lyon comments, "Religious identities are being reconstructed today to overcome the felt disjuncture between the legacy of conventional identities, with their traditional, linear progression, and the diverse experiences cobbled together under the sign of mobility."¹³ Commodities are tailored to the consumer and require no long term commitment or personal risk; such is the nature of commodified religion. "It is this particular connection that is most challenged by the commodification of culture, where beliefs and commitments are easily reduced to a decorative function of providing private meaning to fill in the voids left by the structures of everyday life."¹⁴ Commodified religion teaches individuals to interpret religious beliefs, symbols, and rituals through the interpretive lens of consumption, not community. Although the good news of hope and healing which the biblical narrative proclaims should not be ignored, the therapeutic ethos which has resulted from the commodification of religion runs contrary to the type of community with the triune God and the Church in which this healing is to take place as envisioned in Grenz's theological method.

Sadly, the Western church has done very little to combat this form of life. Instead of providing Christian people with an alternative interpretive framework in place of the lens of commodification, in many instances the Church itself has adopted this cognitive and moral lens itself. Ward points out, "religions become fetishized, they provide commodities that enable you to fully participate in the frantic pace of the capitalist gauze while sustaining the perception you are not really in it."¹⁵ Religious experience may appear to be an escape—a path to freedom from the frantic pace of the postmodern world. However, in truth religious experience has now been tied in with consumerism and only appears to take the consumer out of the vices of the consumption cycle. Thus, rather than a resource to escape the consumer matrix, religion becomes another exercise in consumption, albeit mystical.

However, as Grenz's theological method urges the Christian community to critically engage in a two-way conversation with culture, awareness of this reigning paradigm is crucial. It seems that at the moment, in contrast to the dozens of books, articles, and sermons attempting to delineate the implications, nature, and proper reaction of Christians to postmodern philosophy, there is a lack in attention being given to these socio-economic-political factors and their consequences for the Church. In order to effectively engage the postmodern situation, the Western Church must take a serious look at the effects that the dominance of consumption has had on Western people in general, and even more specifically, at its effects on Church life.

Response and Recognition

Due to the commodification of culture, including religion, the Church is now confronted with a situation in which it will have to be more creative and intentional about embodying the call to community than maybe ever before in its history. Postmodern culture, dominated by consumption, destructively works against community, intimacy, and *agape* in favor of the unbridled reign of the free market. Currently, it seems that the Church is acting partly out of ignorance of the ways in which the cognitive framework of commodification is shaping its assumptions, and partly out of an unwillingness to face up to the dominating effects of the commodification of culture. As a result, commodified religion manifests itself in this sort of mindset: "If we package it well enough, present it seductively enough, and explain the benefits eloquently enough, people will sign up to be Christians." Henceforth, worship services are reduced to an hour or so, pragmatic sermons on marriage and family are prominent, and large numbers are the primary criteria for success. *Relevance* has replaced *community* as the telos of ecclesiastical life.

Instead of focusing on drawing people into communion with the triune God through the community of faithful believers, the Church has adopted the reigning cultural paradigm out of fear that it will not be able to attract people otherwise. In its current context, the Western Church must work hard to counter the dominance of consumption as an interpretive framework for life. There is a need for not only recognition and resistance to consumerism, but, even deeper than that, to consciously embody, employ, and enact the Christian interpretive framework in order to teach human beings to relate to the triune God, to each other, and to creation as persons, rather than as commodities. The call to community is a call into right relationship—the mode of relating all things for which and in which human beings were created.

Response: Becoming More Human

It is naive of theology, and detrimental to its task, to operate under the assumption that the contemporary situation will not bare its mark on the perpetual conversation surrounding the Christian interpretive framework. Culture will always have a voice in theological conversation. Thus, any engagement with culture cannot advocate an isolated form of church life. A full-scale retreat from the dangers of commodification is not in order. Rather, in *Beyond Foundationalism*, Grenz and

Instead of focusing on drawing people into communion with the triune God through the community of faithful believers, the Church has adopted the reigning cultural paradigm out of fear that it will not be able to attract people otherwise.

Franke insightfully point out that in the dialogue with culture one of the major things the Church can offer the wider culture is a perspective on how to become more human. They write, "Christians are not called to be a group that exists over against the rest of humankind. In fact, they are not called to be anything but truly human."¹⁶ It is this human element—this perspective on humanness—that might prove to be the Church's most valuable point of dialogue with the postmodern situation. They continue, "In short, Christians are co-participants with people around them in an ongoing conversation about what it means to be human."¹⁷ In a context in which in many ways our humanness has been stripped from us by the rampant commodification of all things—even human beings—this conception of what it means to be human lies at the heart of the Church's conversation with culture. The co-authors make an important point.

What makes this particular group unique—that is, what makes it uniquely 'Christian'—is the participants' desire to engage in this process from a particular vantage point namely, that of viewing all things in connection to the God of the Bible who they believe is revealed supremely in Jesus Christ. This above all marks the connection between the Christian communal culture and the theological enterprise.¹⁸

It is the identity-forming biblical narrative, which, coupled with the other resources of Christian theology, gives the Chris-

tian community a unique, helpful, and constructive viewpoint of what it means to be human.

Of course, stemming from this unique conception of humanness, there are social and political components of the Christian community's witness to the world which also must be carefully considered. It follows that the Church should have an active voice in matters involving personhood and justice which are in accord with the biblical view of humanness. Following Grenz's theological method, the task of this essay has been to simply point out the need for critical engagement with culture at the level of rival interpretive frameworks, consumption and community. The first step in the process of engagement is the recognition of the cultural framework in place—the framework that shapes our culture cognitively and morally. One of the consequences of the dominance of consumption in the current cultural context has been the erosion of cultural resources that might provide any sense of meaning or coherency to life.

We have become enveloped by an instrumental and technical reason that threatens to strip us of our humanness. After the erosion of all other cultural factors, it is only theology, or rather, theological communities, which have the resources left to provide any sense of coherence within the fragmentation and chaos of postmodernity. In and among the postmodern melee, the Christian community has an opportunity not only to provide a witness to the Story that forms its shared identity, a Story that powerfully and uniquely testifies to what it means to be a human being in light of the revelation of the *imago Dei*, but through that Story to remind the political principalities, the economic powers, and the everyday person of our world of what it means to be a person, and not a commodity.

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Notes

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 8. John Francis Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society: The Spirituality of Cultural Resistance* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 26.
 9. Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland*, 90.
 10. *Ibid.*
 11. Graham Ward, *True Religion* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 133.
 12. *Ibid.*
 13. Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland*, 91.
 14. Miller, *Consuming Religion*, 91.
 15. Ward, *True Religion*, 125.
 16. Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 164.
 17. *Ibid.*
 18. *Ibid.*
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Reflection

Stanley J. Grenz's Contribution to Evangelical Theology

by Roger E. Olson

I find it difficult to write about Stan Grenz and his theological contribution in the same way that I would write about any other theologian. Stan was a close friend and his passing on March 12, 2005 left a large void in my life and in the lives of his family and other close friends. His death also left a large void in evangelical theology; he had evolved into the leading theologian of the evangelical movement and desperately wanted evangelical theology to get on the map, so to speak. He wanted it to be recognized as a legitimate form of modern or contemporary theology alongside the other types of theology that make up the mosaic of current theological schools of thought. To that end, he worked tirelessly to raise the standard of evangelical theological reflection, and perhaps the main element of that tireless project was ironically to disassociate evangelical theology from both modernity and fundamentalism.

Stan was always a theologian of the center. He was dissatisfied with flaky evangelical experiments of all kinds including theological ones. He told me privately on a number of occasions that he was "gravely concerned" about open theism and the emergent church network. He considered people in both movements friends, but he was dismayed by what he regarded as their all too easy and quick abandonment of theological tradition in favor of theological or ecclesiastical innovation. Stan had a traditionalist side. On the other hand, he also expressed to me privately grave concern about evangelical traditionalism, especially as it bordered on fundamentalism and manifested itself in maximal conservatism and heresy-hunting. Stan was a pietist. He regarded dead orthodoxy, rigid dogmatism, reactionary conservatism, and theological wrangling over secondary matters of the faith evidences of a faith that has both lost its nerve and become insecure. He was no friend of those who wanted to expel open theists and others who dared to propose new ways of looking at traditional doctrines from professional societies and from their teaching positions.

So, first and foremost, Stan was a centrist theologian within the evangelical movement who strove to discover, strengthen, and renew an evangelical *via media* between unfettered theological experimentation cut loose from tradition and neo-fundamentalism that seeks to monopolize evangelical thought and exclude all who express dissent or engage in thought experiments

that diverge from the "received evangelical tradition." In this he was guided by a vision of historic pietism – not the pietism gone to seed of quietist withdrawal from rigorous engagement with the life of the mind but the true, classical pietism that sees transformation of persons and communities as more essential than dogmas to defining authentic evangelical faith. He liked

to describe himself as a "pietist with a Ph.D.," by which he meant a person devoted equally to intellectual and spiritual development in the service of Jesus Christ and his church. He had little patience with those evangelicals who he thought wanted to discard or downplay the centrality and cruciality of the heart in evangelical Christianity. At the same time, he had no patience for those evangelicals who he thought wanted to revel in spiritual experi-

ences to the neglect of doing the hard work of understanding the faith with the mind. The pursuit of truth without answers just for the joy of the journey was not Stan's style. Nor was anti-intellectual revivalism, although he could sing old gospel songs with gusto and heartfelt delight.

Besides being a centrist evangelical who attempted to combine spirituality with intellectual theology, Stan was a person deeply concerned that evangelicalism not tie itself to the past uncritically. He was profoundly displeased with those evangelicals who wanted only to reiterate the ideas of the church fathers or the magisterial reformers or the Princeton theologians or anyone else from the past. He referred to this phenomenon by paraphrasing a line from Star Trek. According to him, too many evangelical theologians wanted only to go where everyone has already gone before. He saw this attitude as dominant among the movers and shakers of the Evangelical Theological Society and told me in private that the 2005 meeting in Philadelphia would be his last. He wanted to found a new evangelical professional society for theologians and other scholars. He wanted it to encourage fresh thinking, while holding high the banner of trinitarian hermeneutics. He wanted it to be a "big tent" with open sides – in other words, a diverse group of committed evangelicals with a common center but open boundaries. He did not want it to be dominated by a conservative impulse, and yet he did want it to be clearly and unequivocally evangelical.

In my opinion, Stan's main contribution to evangelical theology lies in his tireless effort to define the term "evangelical"

Stan's main contribution to evangelical theology lies in his tireless effort to define the term "evangelical" without all the traditional baggage of the "evangelical enlightenment."

without all the traditional baggage of the “evangelical enlightenment,” by which he meant evangelical foundationalism. He believed that conservative evangelicals had tied their definition of evangelicalism too closely to modernity, which he considered a dying, if not dead, cultural context. For him, the appeal to a “received evangelical tradition” to stifle fresh thinking about the faith was all too often a covert appeal to a way of thinking that most younger people in Western culture know little about and is not part of the gospel itself. That way of thinking he called foundationalism. It appeared in attempts to move directly from scriptural exegesis or tradition to contemporary systems of evangelical theology, as well as in attempts to construct hermetically sealed, absolutely coherent systems of doctrinal propositions. He saw in these conservative theological projects attempts to leave behind both the Spirit and the Word and replace them with reason and system.

Stan’s most important and most controversial monograph was undoubtedly his 1993 book *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (IVP). There he defined evangelicalism and evangelical theology in terms of experience and spirituality, which caused many conservative critics to raise cries of “Schleiermacher!” I even heard one evangelical seminary president ask publicly of Stan’s project, “Isn’t anyone else worried about Schleiermacher?” But such critics clearly did not understand Stan’s proposal. He was not elevating some universal religious apriority to the status of essence of evangelical faith, nor was he attempting to establish a new foundationalism of spirituality. Rather, he was simply recognizing evangelicalism’s roots in pietism and revivalism and arguing that what all evangelicals have always had in common and do have in common is something called “conversional piety” – the personal relationship with Jesus Christ that shapes evangelical story-telling, hymnody, preaching, witnessing, and way of life. But a part of this spirituality is recognition of the Bible as uniquely the written Word of God through which the Spirit speaks and by which Christians’ identities are formed. It also involves community and tradition, which cannot be separated from individual identity formation.

Stan was absolutely bewildered by some of the reactions to his *Revisioning* proposal, especially the one that equated it with Schleiermacher’s project. For Stan, evangelical theology is not experiential-expressivism or cognitive-propositionalism. Nor was he especially enamored with the postliberal approach, especially as outlined by George Lindbeck in *The Nature of Doctrine*. Rather, Stan viewed evangelical theology as the faithful continuation of tradition within the faithful community of God’s people under the guidance of the Spirit of God speaking through inspired Scripture with an eye toward cultural relevance. But when it came to identifying the heart and soul of evangelical faith, he turned to the spiritual experience of the individual and

of the community centered around conversion to Jesus Christ – a supernatural, transforming work of the Spirit of God that should drive a person deeper into his or her spiritual roots and especially deeper into the book.

Stan wanted to contribute a new or renewed theological method to evangelical theology. It is something like the old “three legged stool” method of Richard Hooker’s Anglicanism. But Stan liked the analogy of a conversation and used it as a path out of foundationalism. For him, theology has three primary sources and norms or “tools” as he sometimes called them – scripture, tradition, and culture. He viewed reason and experience as tools of theology insofar as they are necessary for guiding the hermeneutical process. Stan and I spent many hours arguing about the Wesleyan Quadrilat-

**No theological proposal can be
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eral versus his “three legged stool” analogy. I prefer to include reason and experience in the theological conversation and relegate culture to a secondary status as a hermeneutical tool for shaping theology’s communication to a contemporary context, but Stan remained adamant that no theology is culture-free, nor does it transcend culture. Therefore, he imported culture into his methodology as an equal partner with scripture and tradition. For him, evangelical theology is an ongoing conversation between these three sources and norms with scripture playing a dominant role. It served in his theological method as “first among equals.” No theological proposal can be considered valid that violates scripture or the best of tradition (that is, the great tradition of Christian faith down through the centuries) or that flies in the face of the best of contemporary culture. None of that is to say that theology must serve any one source or norm slavishly, but it must take all three into account in its constructive tasks. So, theology is a triologue, a conversation between scripture, tradition, and culture using reason and experience as guidance mechanisms.

When I read Stan’s magnum opus, his *Theology for the Community of God* and his last two monographs, *The Social God and the Relational Self* and *The Named God*, I can see his method at work, and yet I think he did not follow it as he laid it out in several of his books. In fact, as I interpret even his last books, Stan followed a fairly traditional Protestant methodology of allowing the written, inspired Word to determine the shape of his thought and his conclusions. That is not to say he was secretly or covertly a fundamentalist. But he most definitely treated scripture as more than merely a “first among equals” in constructing theology. His call for evangelical theology to place greater stock in contemporary culture, however, is one of his main contributions. He was especially concerned that evangelicals find faithful and creative ways to engage positively with postmodern culture. One way in which Stan did this was to fight against individualism in evangelicalism and Christianity in general. He regarded the (Please see page 40)

Reflection

Stanley Grenz, Women in Ministry, and the Trinity: A Model in Practical Theology

by David Kline

As other articles in this journal make clear, Stanley Grenz was a careful and articulate theologian who produced some of the most deeply engaged evangelical theology of the last decade. Should this be Grenz's only legacy, it would be impressive. But Grenz was more than simply an academic theologian. Indeed, Grenz was concerned with contributing to the whole community of God, as the title of his systematic theology makes clear.¹ This included not only writing academic theology, but also writing on issues that are more concrete and challenges that confront the church. The diverse subjects covered in his substantial body of books range from a primer on Baptist congregations to a ministerial response to AIDS.

Among the concerns with which he was seriously engaged was the affirmation of women's roles in ministry, particularly within the evangelical context in which he functioned. This essay will survey the contributions of Grenz and others like him in this area, and it will reflect on how these contributions might be fruitfully received, not only by the specifically evangelical audience to which they were targeted, but also by the more general community of the mainline church.

As a recently released book shows, evangelicals have historically been very open to the participation of women in various levels of ministry.² Especially in the decades surrounding the turn of the 20th century, examples of women actively preaching and teaching in evangelical settings and denominations abound. Indeed, this participation was not without theological reflection; both females and males wrote books that biblically justified women's ministry. Most of these works tended to take one of two stances. Either they argued that the Joel 2 prophecy about daughters prophesying was fulfilled in Acts 2, thereby justifying women's preaching, or, more radically at the time, they argued for total equality based on the broader theological theme of creation and redemption, in which the negative effects of the fall were redeemed by Christ's atoning sacrifice.³ Likewise, among the holiness movements, pneumatological defenses that emphasized the Spirit's calling to Christian ministry were especially prevalent.

This tradition began to decline in the 1930s and was soon virtually eliminated due to the rise of separatist fundamentalism and its more literalist scriptural hermeneutic.⁴ It was not until the 1970s that evangelicals began to challenge the nearly universal evangelical assumption that women should be barred from

ministry.⁵ The first prominent evangelical book in this vein, *All We're Meant to Be*,⁶ appeared in 1974. This was quickly followed in 1975 by Paul Jewett's controversial *Man as Male and Female*⁷ and then by Patricia Gundry's 1977 *Women Be Free!*⁸ Following Gundry, a slow but steady stream of books were published in the 1980s, often arguing on scriptural and exegetical grounds for women's participation in ministry. Some of the books approached the issue from different perspectives, like Jannette Hassey's *No Time for Silence*,⁹ which presented the turn-of-the-century movement mentioned above as an argument that evangelical feminism was not "a misguided effort to emulate the

secular feminism which [had] gained ground since the 1950s."¹⁰

Grenz stepped into this mix in 1995 with *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Min-*

istry,¹¹ in which argues that "historical, biblical and theological considerations converge not only to allow but indeed to insist that women serve as full partners with men in all dimensions of the church's life and ministry."¹² The book is "by evangelicals" and "is also primarily for evangelicals."¹³ After 1995, Grenz made a concerted effort to keep the topic of women's participation in ministry on the evangelical agenda. In the same year, an article rehearsing many of the theological arguments from *Women in the Church* appeared in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*.¹⁴ In 1998, the same journal published another article, which, while on a slightly different topic, continued to argue in a similar vein.¹⁵ While *Women in the Church* did address specific biblical texts, Grenz argued that the discussion needed to "move beyond isolated passages of Scripture to speak about broader theological themes"; he emphasized that it is "ultimately in the context of foundational doctrinal commitments that the biblical texts find their cohesion."¹⁶ Grenz is noteworthy in that his academic articles consistently moved to these foundational doctrinal commitments. His theological arguments for the full participation of women in ministry were consistently rooted in the doctrine of the Trinity.

In rooting his discussion here, Grenz joined a significant discussion among evangelicals concerning the doctrine of the Trinity and its implications for human interaction. As early as 1979, before the egalitarian movement had gained much momentum, Wayne Grudem, a prominent evangelical voice in this discussion, stated that "a proper understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity may well turn out to be the most decisive factor in

Grenz's arguments for the full participation of women in ministry were rooted in the doctrine of the Trinity.

finally deciding" the debate over male-female relationships.¹⁷

The significant question regarding issue arises from the doctrine of the Trinity and concerns the relationship of the Son to the Father. Specifically, is the Son eternally subordinate to the Father? If so, or if not, what are the implications for the traditional subordination of females to males? Evangelicals have offered different answers to these questions. For instance, some argue that the Son is eternally subordinate to the Father and that females are called to model this subordination in their relationships to males.¹⁸ Such authors are quick to state that they do not think this subordination renders the Son less than God—there is subordination with respect to roles and equality with respect to being.¹⁹ This idea has provoked significant response, including a full-length book by Anglican priest Kevin Giles who argues against eternal subordination with the question of gender relationships in mind.²⁰

Grenz is well known for his work on the Trinity, and the way he relates the Trinity to human relationships is also important. Grenz advocated a "social Trinity,"²¹ which he argued should be a model for a humanity created in the *imago Dei*. This image "is found in human community"²² and should be reflected in individual male-female relationships. Furthermore, it should be reflected in the church. While Grenz did not reject the idea that "the Son is in some sense subordinate to the Father within the eternal Trinity,"²³ he emphasized that "the Father is also dependent on the Son."²⁴ This balance "leads to an emphasis on mutual dependence and the interdependency of male and female in human relationships,"²⁵ which therefore calls for "structures that foster the cooperation of women and men in all dimensions of church life."²⁶ In this way, Grenz struck a compromise between

the two common stances.

In addressing women's roles in ministry, Grenz and his interlocutors have taken up a very significant debate. On the one hand, it is important in its practical applications. Especially within the evangelical church, a large percentage of which does not permit women to hold pastoral authority over men, this topic must be continually addressed. Notably, evangelical groups are not the only ones struggling with this question; significant main-line bodies are still addressing it to some extent. For example, the Church of England recently debated opening the way for female bishops. For this body, the question of women's ministry also impacts the larger Anglican Communion, which has recently been threatened with schism from various sides, including traditionalists who would refuse the oversight of a female bishop.

What is even more important than these concerns, however, is the ground on which this issue is being addressed. While the discussion was originally focused on specific biblical texts, it has increasingly shifted to theology, and it has focused on of the doctrines most crucial to Christianity, namely the Trinity. In addressing important issues in church life by looking first to scripture and then to how it should be read theologically, Grenz and evangelicals like him have provided an admirable example for other groups to follow. Not only have they been willing to wrestle with one of the most significant Christian doctrines in an attempt to better understand the God whom we worship; they believe such wrestling matters to the life of the church. It can only be hoped that other groups might be so brave.

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at Princeton Theological Seminary.

Notes

1. *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994).
2. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, eds., *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004). See especially the chapter entitled "Evangelical Women in Ministry a Century Ago: The 19th and Early 20th Centuries."
3. Pierce and Groothuis, eds., *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 45.
4. *Ibid.*, 52.
5. For more information on this and the movement since then, see the chapter "Contemporary Evangelicals for Gender Equality," in Pierce and Groothuis, eds., *Discovering Biblical Equality*.
6. Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, *All We're Meant to Be: A Biblical Approach to Women's Liberation* (Waco, TX: Word, 1974).
7. Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female: A Study in Sexual Relationships from a Theological Point of View* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975).
8. Patricia Gundry, *Woman, Be Free!* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977).
9. Janette Hassey, *No Time for Silence: Evangelical Women in Public Ministry Around the Turn of the Century* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1986).
10. Roger Nicole's endorsement on the back cover of Hassey, *No Time for Silence*, quoted in Pierce and Groothuis, eds., *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 64.
11. Stanley J. Grenz and Denise Muir Kjesbo, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in the Ministry* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1995).
12. Grenz and Kjesbo, *Women in the Church*, 16.
13. *Ibid.*, 17.
14. Stanley Grenz, "Anticipating God's New Community: Theological Foundations for Women in Ministry," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38 (1995): 595-611.
15. Stanley Grenz, "Theological Foundations for Male-Female Relationships," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41 (1998): 615-30.
16. Grenz and Kjesbo, *Women in the Church*, 142.
17. Wayne Grudem, "Review of George W. Knight, *The New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women*," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 22 (1979): 376.
18. E.g., Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004): 405-42, which is an extended argument for this position.
19. Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 415.
20. Kevin Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2002).
21. Grenz, "Theological Foundations," 617.
22. Grenz, "Theological Foundations," 620.
23. Grenz, "Anticipating God's New Community," 597.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Grenz, "Anticipating God's New Community," 598.
26. *Ibid.*

Reflection

Stan Grenz Among the Baptists

by Myles Werntz

The death of Stan Grenz on March 12, 2005, left the theological world without an irenic mediator between two traditions that have largely been out of the mainstream theological conversation: Baptists and evangelicals. The author of twenty-five books and hundreds of articles, Grenz's work contributed to the work of defining evangelicals in a postmodern period. For the most part, Dr. Grenz's academic contributions have been received in the contexts of the evangelical world and in the realm of the Emerging Church movement, but long overlooked have been his thoughtful contributions to the search for a Baptist identity. Before he was aligned with Emergent, and before his work on evangelical renewal took center stage late in his life, his work paralleled that of Baptist theologian James McClendon and the authors of the more recent Baptist Manifesto.¹ It is in this identity as a Baptist that Grenz's corpus finds its roots, offering future Baptists an example of how confessional piety and academic rigor might be combined in fruitful ways.

An examination of how the subjects of Grenz's work changed over time help to reveal his shifting interests. Many who have read only Grenz's later works may not know that his earliest books centered on the legacy of Isaac Backus² and on the polity of the North American Baptist church.³ These books were written for a more general audience in order to articulate what was often subject to confusion within Baptist churches: polity, meaning, and practices. By 1990, his interests shifted slightly and he wrote longer works that were directed at the larger world of evangelical thought and practice. He was particularly concerned with millennialism and the role of women in the church, which were the pressing issues for the evangelical world at the time. While seemingly minor issues in the theological world at large the writing that would be done during this period is significant, for in this early work, we see that Grenz's writing would consistently confront issues that were relevant to the audience which would be reading his books.

First and foremost, Grenz was a man of the church. He was ordained in the North American Baptist church in 1976, received early training at North American Baptist Seminary, and held posts at Baylor University and Carey Theological School in Vancouver in Baptist Heritage. Methodologically, as a churchman, he was thus unwilling to divorce theological reflection from the issues with which his particular church context was wrestling, regardless of scope. As he noted in a 1990 address on spirituality to the Evangelical Theological Society:

The line of thought I offer is induced—almost simplistically—from my own quest of spirituality fostered by, and nurtured within an unabashedly, unashamedly Baptist context. What follows, therefore, is an admittedly subjective attempt to come to grips with what to me is the specif-

ically Baptist approach to the age-long quest to know God and grow in godliness—an approach which as a Baptist I myself share.⁴

In the early 1990s, the rise of conservatism in the largest Baptist body in North America, the Southern Baptist Convention, made questions about Baptist identity even more acute. Baptists and evangelicals alike were coming to grips with the paradigm shifts within the North American context of truth-telling, gender issues, and ethics. At the heart of these surface questions was the deeper one of what it means to be Christian in the world and to articulate this in a world which no longer recognized the foundationalism of an earlier generation.⁵

While Grenz was wrestling with the questions of Christian identity in the larger evangelical world, other more explicitly Baptist voices were raising similar questions. James McClendon's *Ethics* came out in 1986, voicing not only the need for a return to a communal understanding of theology, but also a need to examine how theological communities might articulate themselves in a changing world. McClendon states that:

...a totally ossified community is a contradiction in terms. In a changing world, an unchanging community acquires a new environment, natural and human, thus a new set of relations to the world...⁶

McClendon and others would later formulate the 1997 Baptist Manifesto, a document calling for a return to this manner of communality, in the reading of Scripture and in the practices of the church.⁷ This document, which created no small stir within Baptist life, was a call to a communal understanding of the manner in which Christian life was conducted in continuity with the Reformers of pre-modernity. Emphasizing the free common life given by Christ, which grounds Christians in their engagements in the world, the Manifesto marked a new way beyond both individualism and authoritarianism. While not a signer of the Manifesto himself, Grenz, in his addresses to the wider evangelical world, began to exhibit similar turns in his own work.⁸

With the publication of *Renewing the Center*,⁹ a way forward for a new theological age was offered to evangelicals, much in the way that the earlier *Manifesto* had sought to offer itself as a fresh reading for Baptist communities in particular. Grenz highlights the current evangelical crisis of identity, positing that the way forward for evangelicals at large must be marked by many of the same standards which were proposed by the framers of the *Manifesto* a few years earlier. Particularly, he points to the practices including cultural engagement,¹⁰ the communal interpretation of Scripture,¹¹ and a more ecumenical approach to doctrinal issues,¹² the first two of which are of par-

tical emphasis in the *Manifesto*.

The departure from his fellow Baptists is with Grenz's emphasis on the ecumenical nature of this renewal, which the *Manifesto* sees as a secondary step following the inward renewal of the believers' church.¹³ Similarly, the issue of sacraments receives little notice in the proposal of *Renewing*.¹⁴ This is again, not to be taken as a mark against Grenz's Baptist roots. One must first consider the context in which Grenz was writing, as a Baptist addressing a large cross-section of the Church, ranging from Catholics to non-denominational Christians, in contrast to the framers of the *Manifesto*, who are addressing Baptists first and the larger Church secondly. Given the constraints which context places on both sets of work, the parallel trajectories of Grenz and other more self-identified Baptists at this time is striking.

Ironically, however, these movements by Grenz have not been understood in terms of his own self-identity as a Baptist. And as one who saw Baptists as a part of the larger Church first, Grenz's work has largely been appropriated in terms of its evangelical thought. More recently, the Emergent church movement had been looking to Grenz as one in the academy most sympathetic with its concerns regarding engagement with post-modernity.¹⁵ As Grenz noted, however, it is our presence within the Christian community (which for Grenz was a specifically Baptist one) that leads us towards the theological task.¹⁶ Citing McClendon's insight that "Christian theology is always theology of the community, not just of the individual Christian," Grenz squares himself within his own context in order to reflect upon the church at large. For this reason, I would contend that Grenz's theology cannot be rightly understood apart from his

Baptist context. To understand Grenz is to understand that he was a Baptist.

As a relatively latecomer to the world of Baptists, I found my own life enriched by the writings and careful dialogues that Dr.

Grenz brought out in ways which enriched my life, both in seminary and in my current doctoral work. As James McClendon pointed out in the opening pages of *Ethics*, the notorious lack of Baptist systematic theology is due largely in part to Baptists seeing themselves as people contextually situated, on journey by the Spirit into the world.¹⁷ As one in this flexible Baptist tradition, but also one negotiating the rigors of the academy, I found this

pronouncement largely disheartening. How is one then to remain both Baptist and academic, if theological reflections are constantly subject to revision, and even seemingly contradictory at times? What does it mean to be both Baptist and academic?

In the work of Stan Grenz, I found the voice of a Baptist, both academic and faithful, rigorous and generous. I found a voice who viewed his academic methodology as an expansion of his spirituality, where because we are a people on journey with God in the world, our reflections must *necessarily* change as the journey changes. The negotiations of Scripture and church and world, subject to the Spirit in community, are part of our worship, and as such, part of my academic discipline. His work, viewed in concert with other contemporary Baptist thinkers, provides a full expression of how Baptist theology for the future might unfold: profoundly confessional and self-understood, and profoundly engaging with the larger Church.

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Notes

1. The *Manifesto*, issued in 1997 by the late James McClendon and six other Baptist theologians, charted a new direction for Baptist life and polity, seeking to reinterpret Baptist thought apart from an individualist framework, emphasizing communal practices and communal reading of Scripture. The original document was first seen in *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 24 (1997), 303-310, and now online at <http://home.sprintmail.com/~masthewitt.baptists.manifesto.html>. Responses to the initial *Manifesto* include Walter Shurden's response "The Baptist Identity and the Baptist Manifesto," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 25 (1998), 321-340.
2. Stanley J. Grenz, *Isaac Backus--Puritan and Baptist: His Place in History, His Thought, and Their Implications for Modern Baptist Theology* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983). Isaac Backus was an early American instrumental in securing religious freedom for Baptists in Massachusetts.
3. Stanley J. Grenz, *The Baptist Congregation: A Guide to Baptist Belief and Practice* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1985).
4. Stanley J. Grenz, "Maintaining the Baptist Life: The Baptist Vision of Spirituality," in *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 18 (1991), 60.
5. Grenz will deal extensively with these issues in his and John Franke's *Beyond Foundationalism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001). With this work, Grenz inaugurates his criticism of classical foundationalism, opting for more coherentist understandings of truth, very similar to those appropriated by McClendon in *Ethics*. Note further the words of the 1997 Manifesto: "Since the patterns of certitude, privilege, and power that modernity engendered are passing away (1 Cor 7:31), it is time to admit that all theologies tied to the foundational assumptions of the Enlightenment will share the same fate. We thus urge our fellow Baptists to say farewell to modernity and its theological offspring because there is no other foundation for our faith than Jesus Christ (1 Cor 3:11)."
6. James Wm. McClendon and James M. Smith, *Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994), 108.
7. James McClendon, et. al., "Re-envisioning Baptist Identity: A Manifesto for Baptist Communities in North America," in *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 24:3 (1997), 303-310, (referred to as Manifesto from here on).
8. Grenz's "Toward a Baptist Theological Method for the Post-Modern Context," in *Baptist History and Heritage* 35 (2000), exhibits how this approach is specifically tailored in a Baptist setting.
9. Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Press, 2000). (Please see page 36)

It is in this identity as a Baptist
that Grenz's corpus finds its roots,
offering future Baptists an ex-
ample of how confessional piety
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combined in fruitful ways.

Reflection

Theology for Pastors: Appreciating Stanley J. Grenz

by William McGrum

While working at a Southern California style, evangelical megachurch in the early 1980's, I loaned books from my library on a regular basis to another member of the church staff who headed up college ministries for this congregation while still enrolled in seminary. As far as I know this gentleman, Scott, never purchased any theology books. What he needed, he borrowed from me, studied for his classes, wrote the required papers, and took the tests. Then, he would return them and borrow still others for yet another class. Across the months of this strange affair I loaned Scott many commentaries, Greek and Hebrew handbooks, works on Church history, and various systematic theologies. I naively assumed this arrangement was for financial reasons and never asked otherwise until near the end of Scott's theological studies.

One day, however, I asked him, "Why don't you buy some of these books?" "These are all important works of theology," I said. I then added, "You will need them someday as a pastor. They will help you form a congregation for God."

"Nope," Scott replied. "I won't need them ever again. I'm not interested in theology — just dirt practical ministry."

That, in a nutshell, is the reductionist view of theology historically regnant among evangelicals and the one Stanley J. Grenz consistently sought to overturn throughout his career. Though I never met Grenz, he and I both graduated from the Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary in Denver, Colorado where we were schooled in the doctrine of the "perspicuity of Scripture" and learned that theology was the "science of knowing God" based upon facts distilled from holy writ. However, while Grenz remained Baptist for the whole of his life and a friend of the seminary which first tutored him, he never succumbed to the evangelical fallacy of separating ministry from theology. His numerous books on topics as varied as prayer, AIDS, clergy misconduct, homosexuality, women in ministry, discipleship, and sexual ethics together with his heavier works on the theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg, theological method, Baptist identity, eschatology, theological pluralism, the Trinity, Christian ethics, postmodernism, and two volumes of a now unfinished dogmatics prove the point. Indeed, one of his more widely read books, *Created for Community*, carries the subtitle, "Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living."¹ Theology for Grenz was nothing less than "dirt practical ministry" even

as "dirt practical ministry" could not be other than theological. Indeed, for myself, as well as for many others who graduated from conservative schools of theology in the closing decades of the twentieth century, Stanley J. Grenz proved a wise and loving guide in our journey away from "the propositionalist approach to the theological enterprise" toward a "revisioned evangelical theology" with a "distinctively practical intent."²

**Evangelical theologians
must always operate as
believers within actual
communities of faith
and not as disinterested
scholars engaged in
religious studies.**

For Grenz, what mattered was the living community of faith dwelling before the face of God. Evangelical theology, as Grenz "revisioned" it in richly nuanced conversation with many others across the wide theological spectrum, was less about propositions distilled from Scripture and more about critical reflection upon the faith of the community so as to guide the people of God into new and fresh avenues of ministry. For this, Grenz saw theologians as pastors and pastors as theologians. That is, while there remained a division of labor within

the household of God, there was not a separation of offices into balkanized institutions facing each other across a yawning divide. In Grenz, ministry and theology mutually informed each other, grew and changed through critical collaboration, and together pressed on to the common goal of bringing all human beings "into a corporate whole, a fellowship of reconciliation, which not only reflects God's own eternal reality but actually participates in that reality."³

This is not to suggest that I have always liked what I read in Grenz's books. I have the sometimes habit of writing notations in the front of books, recording there the date along with a few general comments. Here is my entry for July 30, 1993 from the front piece of *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*:

Mixed on my review. Many good thoughts and insights. But, the writing style is too breezy — not tight enough. It's sloppy, I think. Yet, the call to a bolder evangelical theology is wonderful!

To be sure, this is not a ringing endorsement yet one I still share after having read *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* again while preparing this piece for print. Indeed, I was surprised that now thirteen years later I still agreed with most of my marginalia scribbled down in passionate, grateful conversation with Grenz when first I read this book. And, I added as much if not more

comments on this second reading.

Furthermore, where I no longer agreed with my earlier marginal notes I now see that I was wrong and Grenz was right. Granted, I still think Grenz may be historically sloppy at some points in his narrative. However, he is absolutely spot on regarding the turn evangelical theology must make away from "the older enterprise of biblical summarization" toward critical reflection on the faith of the community and for the faith of the community, if it is to "foster a truly evangelical spirituality that translates into ethical living in the social-historical context in which we are called to be the people of God."⁴

Like our mentor Dr. Vernon C. Grounds, Grenz was unafraid to learn from other disciplines, particularly the human sciences. Thus, through years of conversation with scholars of many kinds and traditions, Grenz came to embrace the notion that "personal identity is formed within social structures," structures which mediate all knowing—including divine revelation.⁵ "The implications for theology," he wrote, "of this understanding of the relationship of the community to individual faith formation are immense."⁶ As Grenz put it, among evangelicals the older ideal was that "of the isolated scholar seeking to systematize the deposit of truth found in the Bible."⁷ This classical approach now gave way to an emergent view of theology as a second-order discipline "called forth by faith, as Christians seek to reflect on the reality of faith."⁸ For Grenz this meant evangelical theologians must always operate as believers within actual communities of faith and not as disinterested scholars engaged in religious studies. "Theologians do not seek to free themselves from their own faith commitments," he wrote, "and their faith communities. Rather, they begin with a sympathetic attitude toward the religious tradition in which they stand."⁹ However, though located within a tradition of knowing and though continually shaped by their life with a particular faith-community, evangelical theologians must engage in conversation with other disciplines to the end of understanding human persons and the world in its multiple complexities of form and texture "as existing in relationship to the reality of God" and thereby aim to fashion models for conceptualizing God and grasping "God's purposes in the world."¹⁰ Thus, it is the task of evangelical theology, Grenz wrote, to construct "an analogue model of reality viewed from the vantage point of commitment to the God revealed in Jesus."¹¹

Though there remain several important constituent parts to the "turn" as Grenz articulated it, there is here the key start, a new beginning which entirely refocuses evangelicalism's understanding of the theological enterprise. It is the moving away

from the "classical concordance model of theology" to "a renewed understanding of the role of the community in the life of faith."¹² Though still holding that Christian faith is "tied to the truth content of a divine revelation that has been objectively disclosed," Grenz rightly saw that the major problem of evangelical propositionalism was an "underdeveloped understanding of how the cognitive dimension functions within the larger whole of revelation."¹³ By this he meant that evangelicals were slow to admit that their theological systems were largely captive to enlightenment epistemologies which privileged the individual. To upend that modernist view, Grenz wrote:

The revisioning of the theological task is dependent on a renewed understanding of the role of the community in the life of faith. Evangelicals are correct in asserting that the revealed truth of God forms the "basic grammar" that creates Christian identity. Rather than merely being a product of our experience, as certain strands of liberalism have tended to argue, in an important sense the truth about God *creates* our experience. But this identity-creative process is not an individualistic matter occurring in isolation. Instead, it is a development that happens within a community.¹⁴

Grenz's lasting contribution to evangelical pastors was precisely here, locally, at this juncture—here where the turn must happen. As an evangelical and for evangelicals, he once again located the theological task within the community of faith. His revisioned evangelical theology conceived "theology as reflection on the faith commitment of the believing community" for the community of faith.¹⁵

Thus, Grenz was a friend to pastors as he did not see them as passive recipients of his product. Rather, they were his equals and often his teachers. They were the shapers of communities, the places wherein all persons, and perhaps most especially theologians, are to be formed for faithful and ethical living in actual "social-historical" situations.¹⁶ This is where pastors work, constructing local theologies rather than hierarchically imposing imports from distant lands upon the ignorant. Pastors, in dialogue with their communities, the saints from across the sweep of Christian history and critical voices from other disciplines, are local theologians fashioning persons capable of manifesting Christian faith in ways that are local, fresh and authentic.¹⁷

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Notes

1. Stanley J. Grenz, *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living* (Grand Rapids: BridgePoint Books, 1996, 1998).

2. Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 87-88.

3. *Ibid.*, 188.

4. *Ibid.*, 72, 85.

5. *Ibid.*, 73. Here Grenz is indebted to the work, among others, of Charles Taylor, Niklas Luhmann, Gerhard Sauter, Ronald F. Thiemann, and Peter Slater.

6. *Ibid.*, 74.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*, 81.

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BOOK REVIEW

Stanley Grenz, *The Named God and the Question of Being: A Trinitarian Theology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005, pp. 386.

Stanley Grenz assumes a heavy burden in his final book, and one wonders if in the end this burden proves too great to bear. The goal of this book is to reinvigorate the conversation between theology and philosophy by reversing the idea that Christian theology is dependent upon Western ontology for its understanding of God. In the face of the demise of “onto-theology” where such depictions are criticized, Grenz posits an alternative “theo-ontology” in which the question of ontology is pursued from a Trinitarian perspective. The insight that governs his exploration is the notion that the biblical God is “named” and that the plot of the bible can be read as the unfolding of God’s self-naming through the interplay of the three persons of the Trinity. Grenz believes that when the narrative of the God who is “I AM” can be brought into conversation with the unsettled history of the question of Being, a new and productive relationship can be forged that will benefit both sides and will also allow Christians constructively to respond to the challenges of postmodernism.

The book is organized into three parts each containing three chapters comprising what Grenz calls a “triad of triads” (7). He labels the parts “sagas” to indicate that each of the triads depicts a drama which – when taken together with the other two parts of the book – presents the broader story of the relationship between the named God and the question of Being. The three chapters in Part 1 depict the “The Saga of Being” from the pre-Socratic philosophers through its Christianization and into its secularization and demise at the hands of postmodern philosophers. This section contains detailed descriptions of the thought of expected figures in the history of Being like Aristotle and Martin Heidegger, but it also explores the contributions of lesser-known thinkers like Nicholas of Cusa and Arthur Schopenhauer. Part 2 is entitled “The Saga of the I AM,” and here Grenz provides an exhaustive exegetical study of the various “I AM” texts in the bible. Beginning with Yahweh’s revelation to Moses at the burning bush and continuing through the statements of the exalted Jesus Christ in Revelation, Grenz reads these passages canonically as a single narrative of God’s revelation of the divine name. This exegesis ties into Grenz’s claim in Part 3, “The Saga of the Triune Name,” which comprises the heart of his constructive argument. Grenz’s contention is that the biblical depiction of God’s self-naming reveals an “eternal dynamic of naming within the life of the triune God” (290). In short, salvation history can be seen as the process by which God reveals God’s name first to Moses and the prophets, then through Jesus Christ, and finally by means of the Holy Spirit who then shares the divine name with humanity so that human beings can “participate in the dynamic of the self-naming of the self-naming triune God” (370). Having been

drawn into the narrative of the story of the self-naming God, human beings now have a responsibility to converse with others, each of whom has the “Gift of Being Present who is the Spirit” that has been bestowed on all creation (372). This new conversation, Grenz believes, provides a fresh definition of the terms of any future engagement between theology and ontology and suggests a way past the impasse that the demise of “onto-theology” has left for theologians and philosophers in dialogue.

In light of this description, two strengths and two weaknesses are worthy of note. First, the historical survey of the question of Being in philosophy will be useful for both beginning and more experienced theologians. Grenz has an accessible writing style that allows him to summarize an often complicated history in clear and understandable prose. He also aptly identifies important theological undercurrents in the history of the question of Being that are often left unexplored in most histories of philosophy, and this feature alone may be the book’s most useful contribution. A second strength is the concern Grenz shows for the role of scripture in constructive theology. It is important to keep in mind that one of the goals Grenz has for this volume is to engage with what he sees as the postmodern context of modern theology. The fact that he brings scripture into the discussion as both a source of authority and a relevant conversation partner constitutes in and of itself an important theological claim – one that places Grenz firmly within his evangelical heritage, despite his other theological innovations. More important, however, is the way that Grenz brings scripture into his argument. In Part 2, he avoids the tendency selectively to quote token proof-texts, and instead he embarks on a serious and extended treatment of each of the relevant “I AM” texts. His thorough treatment of the whole of the biblical witness and the fact that he reads each text in light of the entire canon set a standard for the use of scripture in future evangelical systematic theologies.

Despite these strengths, however, the book has weaknesses in both style and substance that are hard to overlook. The weakness of style relates to the way Grenz presents his three “sagas” and to the lack of focus he seems to employ in his overall argument. Throughout the book, but especially in the historical and exegetical surveys of Parts 1 and 2, Grenz employs a style of citation in which a series of quotes from multiple scholars are listed one after the other in order to carry the narrative along. The quotation of multiple authorities is not in and of itself a fault, but it often seems as though there is little rhyme or reason to why Grenz has cited certain authors or why these authors carry authority for the particular point he is trying to make. Indeed, it often seems Grenz has plucked quotations out of texts that may or may not have related to the particular discussion at hand in order to advance his point. The result is that these sections seem less like an argument and more like a textbook, and while they provide a helpful survey of the material, they do not make his overall case more convincing. Grenz bases his constructive claim on the narrative that he tells about the question of Being and the history of the divine name. In the end, however, one is left to wonder why this particular construal of the narrative is

the *correct* one, and the sources he cites for support do little to convince the reader of that fact. Furthermore, Grenz often seems to explore secondary issues and questions that relate only tangentially to the book's central thesis. These tangents may indicate an attempt to be comprehensive, but the unintended result is that the volume sometimes seems turgid, inflated, and lacking in focus. Grenz would have been better served if he had synthesized his research into a more tightly woven argument that absorbed the insights from various scholars into the background, while leaving the back-and-forth citations and secondary issues to the footnotes.

The central problem of the book, however, lies in the substance of the argument, particularly in the portrayal of the Trinity and Jesus Christ. Grenz depicts the narrative of God's self-naming as a progressive revelation that "reaches its apex in the coming of Jesus" who is described as the "bearer of the divine name" (370). The incarnation is thus the act by which the self-naming begun with Moses reaches its height, but God's revelation does not culminate with Jesus Christ. Instead, God's self-naming continues with the sending of the Holy Spirit who advances the process of glorifying the divine name even further by sharing that name with human beings who then participate in the dynamic life of the triune God.

The revelation of the divine name, in other words, "comes to light by means of an unfolding drama" that involves a "history of relationships" first between the persons of the Trinity and then between the triune God and human beings (282). One worry sparked by Grenz's portrayal is that, as the "apex" of the divine drama and the "bearer" of the divine name, Jesus Christ occupies merely one stage in a continuing story of God's self-revelation and *not* its center. Indeed, Jesus seems to occupy center stage only during his earthly ministry when he christens the Father with the name "Father." After Christ's ascension, the drama proceeds to the sending of the Holy Spirit and the shar-

ing of the gift of the divine name with humanity, and it seems at this point that *human beings* occupy center stage in the divine life as they participate in the drama of the divine naming. This continuity between the role played by Jesus Christ and the role played by human beings in the divine drama suggests that Jesus Christ is not unique in kind but rather is the inaugurator of a kind of life which will, to some degree, be common to every human being. This notion helps explain why Grenz uses the creation story to establish that the vocation of human beings is "to be the image of God according to the pattern disclosed by Jesus who is the true *imago Dei*" (363). The ontological divide between God and humanity seems to be blurred, and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the mediator between God and humanity seems muddled, as Jesus Christ becomes merely the prototype of what every human being can become in time. This tendency in Grenz's depiction probably has less to do with a conscious decision on his part to move away from a high Christology and more to do with the questionable decision to use the divine name as the central category for discussing the relations of the triune persons. This decision leaves Grenz with a burden that he cannot overcome, and his tendency to be imprecise in his rendering of the triune relations does not help matters.

The Named God and the Question of Being was originally intended to serve as a transition between the first volume of Grenz's theology, *The Social God and the Relational Self* and subsequent volumes. It is impossible to know how the themes in this book might have been improved, developed more fully, and taken in new direction in future volumes. In this sense, then, this book stands in the unfortunate position of bearing the weight for much of what would have come in Grenz's entire theology. Sadly, it is not able to carry the load on its own.

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10. Ibid., 336. Compare his statement that "Christ's disciples are called to live and witness at the center of society and to take upon themselves the burdens of the their world, while knowing that this world offers them no permanent home," with the *Manifesto's* call "to the freedom of faithful discipleship by participating in the way of Jesus, which begins with our confession of faith (Mt 16:15; Rom 10:9-13) and is lived out under the shadow of the cross which is ours to bear (Lk 9:23)."
11. Ibid., 339. Compare Grenz's citations of Michael Horton that Christians ought to "recognize the communal interpretation of Scripture" with the *Manifesto's* denial "that the Bible can be read as Scripture by any so-called scientific or objective interpretive method ... apart from the gospel and the community in which the gospel is proclaimed."
12. Ibid., 342.
13. McClendon in "Re-envisioning," p. 307, notes that "(this call) is first a summons to close off nominal Christianity in our own ranks. It is only second a gesture toward other traditions and communities to the end that they might make disciples of those whom they baptize."
14. Though not including baptismal and Eucharistic practices in his noted *Renewing the Center*, which was Grenz's manifesto to the wider evangelical world, his earlier and equally noteworthy *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), addresses the issues of baptism and Eucharist within his section on ecclesiology. Beginning with a historical survey of the issues surrounding Eucharistic interpretation, he concludes by noting that "the Spirit's ongoing act of constituting the church as the new eschatological community, Christ is present...Those practices provide public occasions initially to confirm and subsequently to reaffirm our loyalty to Christ" (531-540). For Grenz, engagement with the world was the end goal of the ecclesial life, of which ordinances were a part.
15. Grenz lectured at the national Emergent Conventions in 2004 and in 2005, only a month before his passing.
16. Grenz, "Towards a Baptist Theological Method," 97.
17. James Wm. McClendon, *Ethics: Systematic Theology*, vol. 1. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002).

BOOK REVIEW

Stanley Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004, pp. vii+289.

Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology [RTG], one of Stan Grenz's last works, represents a life-long passion of his to re-present and re-cast the role of the Trinity in contemporary theology from that of afterthought to that of theological prolegomena, a passion no doubt nurtured during his time with Wolfhart Pannenberg. Indeed, he sets out in this volume to trace "a golden thread" (222), a "Renaissance" of the doctrine in recent theological work. True to his irenic and synthesizing style, RTG treats the work of thirteen theologians from Friedrich Schleiermacher to T. F. Torrance in five parts, analyzing and illustrating the trinitarian contours of their respective projects. Discussion of each theologian is followed by a *pro* and *con* section that neatly combines reviews on that theologian's work. In this sense, RTG reads something like an anthology of all the reviews written for or against each of eleven 20th-century theologians included therein. RTG is divided into five sections – acts, really – in the dramatic and unfinished story of trinitarian theology. Each theologian presented is examined for their particular presentation of the economic Trinity and immanent Trinity.

Part one, "The Eclipse of Trinitarian Theology," curiously begins with a quote from 1972 by the eminent Jaroslav Pelikan and John P. Whalen, who state that the "most important theological achievement of the first five centuries of the Church" is treated now "with little or no relevance" (6), a claim often substantiated by Barth and others who asserted that Schleiermacher's own treatment of the Trinity in *The Christian Faith* is little more than an "appendix" to a highly romanticized systematic theology. This, however, "comes at the expense of a fair reading and clear grasp of the profundity of [Schleiermacher's] theological perspective" (18). Rather, by developing his theological epistemology through Christology and pneumatology, Schleiermacher's Trinity cinches up the entirety of "the Christian God-consciousness." Although he probably had in mind Luther's revealed God and hidden God, his treatise hints at a tension between the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity, a tension that would manifest itself in Hegel's trinitarian proposal. For Hegel, God as Spirit (*Geist*) is the dialectic, an assertion he claims only makes sense in light of the economic Trinity and God's self-knowledge in God's historical self-actualization in Jesus Christ. Hegel's Trinity, Grenz insists, is extremely influential and is the most important trinitarian development of the 19th century. He states, "Whatever ought to be said about the relationship between theology and philosophy in Hegel's program, we dare not minimize the influence his innovative proposal has had for subsequent trinitarian theology" (31).

Jump ahead 90 years to the 20th century and to Part Two,

"Restoring the Trinitarian Center," in which contra Schleiermacher, Barth's theology of God's self-revelation "places the discussion of God's triunity at the center of the prolegomenon rather than postponing it for the doctrine of God" (39). Central to Barth's argument that we know the immanent Trinity insofar as we know the economic Trinity – although all the movements of the economic Trinity are grounded solely in God's eternal triuneness – is the dictum that we must rely on God's own (economic) revelation of Godself for the grammar of the (immanent) Trinity. Karl Rahner's contribution to the Renaissance rivals Barth's in importance and influence. Rahner's Rule, that the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and vice versa, inspired the work of many successive theologians included in this volume: "...no principle has had a greater influence in shaping the trinitarian theological conversation in the twentieth century" (217). While Grenz acknowledges that Rahner was hardly the author of such a notion, he gives Rahner credit for restating the concept in such a succinct manner, thereby popularizing it. In debate with the Neo-scholastics, Rahner looked to salvation history for the starting point of a trinitarian theology: the Trinity present in salvation history is the immanent Trinity (64).

In Part Three, the drama continues to unfold with proposals from Moltmann, Pannenberg, and Jenson that deepen the emphasis on God's engagement with history and, as such, elaborate the economic Trinity. Interestingly, all to a lesser or greater degree use and modify Rahner's Rule and Barth's emphasis on the revelation of God in Christ. Moltmann's unique contribution to the field lies in his concept of the eschatological unity of the Trinity. This gives his theology a political bent that plays out in the later projects of liberation and feminist thinkers. Pannenberg, Grenz's mentor, takes up the concept of eschatological unity from the angle of divine love in the Trinity, which establishes God's divine rulership over the world. In the case of both theologians, our knowledge of the Trinity comes from the Trinity's concrete engagement in history. Jenson agrees with this emphasis and adds that in viewing the narrative of God's acts in revelation we are viewing the identifying markers of that God. As such, Jesus the "radically temporal" human *is* the second person of the Trinity, not merely some manifestation of the divine *Logos*. For Grenz, this move is the key to Jenson's program: "By postulating an understanding of the divine self-disclosure as narrative, temporal, and eschatological, Jenson has set forth a unique proposal for conceptualizing the ontology of God that carries far-reaching implications for the relationship between time and eternity" (113).

Part Four, "The Triumph of Relationality," introduces Leonardo Boff, John Zizioulas, and Catherine Mowry LaCugna, who each attempt to present the issue in terms of relationality. Boff's proposal casts the Trinity as the paradigmatic relationship, given to model true relationality to humans. He rests on the idea of *perichoresis* to illuminate his idea of the utter "reciprocity" between the Father and Son, which in turn produces the Spirit. Following Rahner's Rule, for Boff, the inner life of the Trinity is evidenced through the outer workings of the Son and the Spirit.

of which he focuses primarily on the character of Mary, who represents incarnation of the Spirit in a similar fashion to the incarnation of the Son in Jesus, thereby introducing an element of the feminine to the Trinity, which Grenz finds strikingly important, if not problematic. The metropolitan of Pergamon, John Zizioulas, is important as the leading figure in rejecting Hegel's approach via subjectivity and substitutes an ontology of "being in communion" by drawing from the Capadocians' concept of God's nature encompassing the one and the many. As such, God is not bound by a nature shared with other beings; rather, God's being is God's nature. Moreover, in describing God's being, the Capadocians chose to join the ontological term *hypostasis* to the sociological term *prosopon*, thereby creating an "ontology of communion" (138), three persons whose being is in the communion they share. Zizioulas stresses the importance of the ontology of personhood for understanding the Trinity and for answering the current philosophical malady of nihilistic and existential perspectives of personhood. Grenz writes, "Zizioulas' idea – that personhood... is constituted by relationships – quickly became standard fare in trinitarian theology, both Eastern and Western" (219). LaCugna goes deeper with her interest in patristic theology and claims that while Nicea saved the Trinity from battle with the Arians, it lost the war against speculation. For LaCugna, "theologia (theological reflection regarding the mystery of God) is indivisible from *oikonomia* (the self-disclosure of and the experience of God in salvation, God *pro nobis*)" (152). So, the debate over the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity does not mean too much to her, because they are essentially caught in the same post-Nicean wash of speculation resulting from a lack of *oikonomia*. Grenz is right when he admits that her proposal "redefines theology" (154). In the end, her Trinity, aside from the looming methodological critique, largely resembles Zizioulas's inasmuch as it emphasizes the being of God consisting of the relationship of the three.

Part Five, "The Return of the Immanent Trinity," picks up with another female theologian, the eminent feminist Elizabeth Johnson, whose *She Who Is* (1992) carries on with a different kind of methodological critique. Johnson is incredibly wary of reified speech about God and of practices that are enslaving or oppressive to any people. Limiting speech about God, she claims, is equivalent to creating an idol; she therefore sets out to seek new ways of "naming God" that are faithful to the triune nature of God but also are "bridge-building" (168). Most unique to her project is her identification of the Spirit with the personified feminine Wisdom of the Old Testament, winning her the title "Sophia's Theologian." However, her return to the im-

manent Trinity is, in the end, only by way of analogy, and she maintains that the analogies theology uses need to be couched in the vocabulary of salvation. Also drawing from analogy, Hans Urs von Balthasar revives the transcendentals (*verum, bonum, pulchrum, unum*) in his trilogy and, like Zizioulas, turns away from the primacy of the subject in German idealism. The aesthetic perception of the individual is surpassed by the beatific vision of the form, which is Jesus the Word made flesh, whose incarnation, passion, and resurrection unfold the drama of the life of the immanent Trinity, a drama that explicitly involves humankind as they are brought into the triune life by Jesus. The ontological move toward God is characteristic of his critical appropriation of the *analogia entis*; the analogy of our being to God's is an "invitation...to enter his mystery," to quote Aidan Nichols (195). Balthasar's impact upon Grenz is evident by the last section of his discussion of Balthasar: "Does the Future Belong to Balthasar?" Grenz ends his study with a discussion on T. F. Torrance's critically realist Trinitarian proposal. Unlike Johnson and Balthasar, Torrance rejects the *analogia entis* in favor of an approach that seeks out God's reality as it actually is presented to us. This is in keeping with how he construes theology as a scientific discipline. Our ticket to information about God comes through what of God's self-knowledge is passed to us through the Spirit as an act of communion, which happens in a threefold manner: participation in the divine life (through the church), the economic Trinity, and then the immanent Trinity. This becomes a kind of theological epistemology as Torrance grapples with the self-disclosure of God in the incarnation of Christ. As such, our knowledge of God is controlled by the "relations eternally immanent in God," as Torrance puts it (212).

If anything, what have the developments of the past 60 years of Trinitarian reflection taught us? As Grenz generously puts it, "[A]ny helpful explication of the doctrine of the Trinity must give epistemological priority to the presence of the trinitarian members in the divine economy but reserve ontological primacy for the dynamic of their relationality within the triune life" (222). In conclusion, Grenz asks, "What kind of ontology will facilitate this theological objective?" Students of any of the thinkers mentioned above will likely argue that one or more of them have already provided such an ontology. Nevertheless, Grenz rightly draws attention with this question and in *RTG* to the fact that the consensus on the answer seems as uncertain today as when Schleiermacher penned *The Christian Faith*.

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9. Ibid.

10. Ibid., 79.

11. Ibid., 82.

12. Ibid., 69, 73.

13. Ibid., 73. "One crucial goal of a revisioned evangelical theology is to move beyond the solely propositionalist paradigm, while maintaining its central affirmation." Ibid., 88.

14. Ibid., 73.

15. Ibid., 87.

16. Ibid., 88.

17. "The contemporary situation demands that we as evangelicals not view theology merely as the restatement of a body of propositional truths, as important as doctrine is. Rather, theology is a practical discipline oriented primarily toward the believing community," Ibid., 79.

BOOK REVIEW

David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003, pp. xii + 448.

One difficulty in reviewing this book is to know how, and whether, to evaluate what seem to be numerous and perhaps dangerous points of ambiguity in Hart's theology and how to discern the extent to which this perceived ambiguity is a function of working from a perspective outside of Hart's Eastern Orthodox tradition. This review will not provide such an evaluation but will focus primarily on Hart's attempt to articulate an apologetically viable theology in a postmodern context, a project shared by Stanley Grenz.

The Beauty of the Infinite provides a sustained theological defense of the goodness of reality: of creation, of God, and of their relationship. Hart's is an unusual theodicy in that, following von Balthasar, he privileges beauty above truth and goodness, though, generally speaking, such an emphasis is perhaps not surprising for an Eastern Orthodox theologian. Hart prefers to couch theology in aesthetic, rather than moral or intellectual terms. His quest is to demonstrate the *beauty* of the Christian story; because the gospel must be tasted and seen, it is a practice of peace that provokes desire. It is never coldly rational. Theology, then, has nothing to fear from postmodernism's interest in the deconstruction of modern rationalism. Yet, to proclaim the truth about reality, theology must address postmodernism's hidden myth of metaphysical violence. Over against this pessimistic fable, Christian theology must tell a radically different tale – a story of original peace and infinite beauty. This story, which Hart glosses as a “Christian rhetoric of peace” (rhetorical because it is an openly persuasive appeal), is Hart's apologetic project.

Hart's book is divided into three major parts. The first explains why postmodern discourse has necessitated the defense of a Christian rhetoric of peace. The middle section, which comprises the bulk of the book, provides such a defense in the form of a constructive theological treatment of the doctrines of the Trinity, creation, salvation, and *eschaton*. The final section addresses the practical defensibility of the Christian rhetoric of peace Hart has articulated, arguing for its ability to elude the deconstruction of a hermeneutics of suspicion and penetrate the oblivion of contemporary consumerism.

Hart argues that postmodern discourse, though ostensibly distancing itself from metaphysics, in fact implicates itself in a metaphysics of violence by divorcing the unrepresentable (associated with the infinite and God by such postmodern theologians as Jean-Luc Marion) and the representable (associated with creation and the rest of reality). This has implications for epistemology as well as social and ethical reality, insofar as the unrepresentable is often equated with the other, implying that the other cannot be known or related to morally. The unrepresentable

other, seen abstractly as the sublime instead of concretely as the beautiful, is denied any particular reality or being that can be narrated in finite terms. Over against this postmodern “story of no more stories” (7), which hypocritically condemns all competing metanarratives, Hart makes a bold assertion: the beauty of the “unrepresentable,” the infinite Other, is visibly continuous with the beauty of this world, and further, its very image has taken concrete and particular form. This is the truly good fabric of reality.

Hart's counter-narrative, which articulates this Christian truth and its significance for the created world, can be read as a response to the challenges of postmodern metaphysics of violence. With his doctrine of the Trinity, Hart counters the assumption that the differences between people and the others around them, and even more, the differences between people and God, the ultimate Other, make peaceful knowledge and relationship impossible. In the divine *perichoresis*, the members of the Trinity continuously give themselves to each other in love, making their differences, the precondition for these relations, a source of harmonious intimacy. And the infinite nature of the Trinity is such that, by God's creative will, the excess of its beauty and peace overflows beyond itself into creation, whose diversity reflects and participates in the beauty of God's being. Thus, in response to the postmodern divorce between the unrepresentable and the representable, Hart defends the *analogia entis*. God's being is reflected in the world and can be recapitulated in harmonious human relationships with God and with each other; creation, to use a favorite metaphor of Hart's, consists of variations on the theme of God's peaceful difference.

Discussing salvation is the greatest challenge for Hart as he must demonstrate against postmodern challenges that God's redemptive plan eludes an economy of sacrificial violence and persuade readers of the aesthetic attractions of the cross. Hart responds by portraying Christ's work in poetic, restorative terms. Christ restores the world to the *imago Dei* by means of a “narrative reversal” of the “story of sin and death” (325) whereby creation is again embraced into a divine narrative of infinite beauty. This restoration is not necessarily sacrificial but aesthetic. Christ demonstrates the truth of what the world really is. His death is not a necessary part of that demonstration, but merely the result of a failed attempt to inhibit God's gift whereby humanity is restored to reflecting God's image. Thus, violence is not essential to salvation, but that which salvation overcomes; violence is not allowed or used by God to end the story, but is transformed into an infinite gift of peace.

Eschatology, for Hart, does not have to do with a point of arrival, but with humanity's endless approach towards the infinite in which it has already begun to participate. Hart's task is to show that the human other is not compromised in this approach. Here again, Hart reiterates his argument that Trinitarian perichoretic difference is the paradigm for harmonious human difference. This time Hart pushes the comparison further, arguing that as in the Trinity each divine person is essential to God's nature as God, each particular human is essential to humanity's

reflection of the image of God. Thus, the differences between people are not only non-violent in their true nature; they actually constitute the very contours of the divine image. In this social vision of the *imago Dei*, the other participates in God's infinite value as an indispensable part of the human community's reflection of divine beauty. Further, insofar as humanity has already been reoriented towards the infinite, even now the pessimistic postmodern notion of the "abyss of the ethical" (411) can be exchanged for an optimistic recognition of the true identity and worth of each human person.

The fact that the dogmatic bulk of the book is framed by two lengthy critiques of postmodern thought clearly indicates that Hart intends his articulation of Christian doctrine to be apologetic in the context of postmodern discourse. More ambiguous is the form of Hart's apologetic. Hart explicitly states that he is more interested in putting forth Christian rhetoric, "which can argue for itself," than in attacking postmodernism (31). This is perhaps a function of Hart's avowed conviction that the best apologetic is Christian dogmatics.

Considering Hart's understanding of his own task, the theological core of his book, which he titles *dogmatica minora*, takes an unusual form. Linguistically, it is noteworthy that Hart spins his Christian rhetoric using some of the most cherished theme-words of postmodern discourse such as "other," "difference," and "gift," while stylistically, Hart's writing has a discursive, elliptical feel. Considering the book's subtitle, such aesthetic

features cannot be dismissed as insignificant. Yet despite its superficially postmodern flavor, Hart's procession through the doctrines of the Trinity, creation, salvation, and *eschaton* could almost be read as a systematic subversion of the "postmodern metaphysics of violence," as Hart explicitly translates most of his positive theological conclusions into postmodern critique.

The form of Hart's *dogmatica minora* is hard to reconcile with his intention to articulate Christian rhetoric peacefully and dogmatically. Not only does Hart seem to be attacking postmodernism, but he seems, at least linguistically and stylistically, to be making his attack on postmodernism's turf. This approach to apologetic is a marked contrast to Hart's characterization of martyrdom as apologetic *par excellence*. Martyrdom is practical; it persuades by peace, making its appeal only in its own peaceful terms. It takes on the very form of Christ. If this is the standard for apologetic, *The Beauty of the Infinite* falls short, ironically proving too absorbed in tearing down competing rhetorical structures in order for its own full beauty to shine forth. Nonetheless, there are moments, as in Hart's closing meditation on martyrdom, when one catches a glimmering prefiguration of that which Hart is struggling to articulate. Were the goal not the full reflection of infinite beauty, this limited foretaste would be a satisfying achievement.

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self-determining individual as a modern myth and argued tirelessly for an understanding of self-identity formation through the lenses of narrative and community together. Every person is shaped by a community, and every community is shaped by an interpretive framework that is rooted in a story. A Christian is a person whose identity has been and is being transformed within the community of God's people, according to the interpretive framework of the Christian metanarrative arising out of scripture as it is used by the Spirit to form the community and individuals' identities within the community. According to Stan, even experience does not precede interpretive framework. Instead, every experience is an interpreted experience, and its interpretation is given within some community context. Thus, there is no "Lone Ranger" Christianity; the myth of the ivory tower theologian speculating on God apart from the church is just that – a myth. It does happen, but its results can hardly be recognized as authentically Christian, and even the ivory tower thinker who tries to do his or her work apart from the community is never really without community or story. Everyone's life is inextricably interwoven with story and community. Christians should never run from that but embrace it. So, for Stan, enlightenment individualism and especially the notion of a transcendental self are foreign bodies too often imported into evangelicalism both in its

popular and scholarly manifestations.

Stan Grenz's legacy to evangelical theology is, then, fourfold. First, it is a call to radical centrism and away from cultural accommodation that manifests itself as unfettered theological experimentation and also away from the hardening of the categories so common among neo-fundamentalists who operate out of maximal conservatism. Second, it is a desire for what I call a post-conservative evangelicalism of ongoing reform tied to the great tradition of Christianity but open to new ways of thinking as God breaks forth new light from God's Word. Third, it is exposure of evangelical theological accommodation to the enlightenment manifested in various forms of foundationalism and a move away from that toward a model of theology as ongoing conversation between several sources and norms. Finally, it is the elevation of community and narrative over individualism and rationalism in theology, as well as in worship and piety. To what extent evangelicals will follow the path forged by Stanley J. Grenz only a prophet could tell. Or maybe even God does not yet know. In any case, Stan's work enriched and deepened evangelical theology and opened new possibilities for younger evangelical scholars to pursue.

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